

Destiny Of The Christian At Death



Foundations (Day 284)
by Derek Prince

What is, in this present dispensation, the destiny of true Christians? We shall see that the New Testament indicates one important difference between the period that preceded Christ's resurrection and that which followed it.

Once full atonement for sin had been accomplished, however, by the death and resurrection of Christ, thereafter the way was open for the spirits of the righteous to ascend immediately and directly into heaven and into the presence of God Himself.

This is made plain by a number of passages in the New Testament, including the account of the stoning of Stephen, the first Christian martyr.

> "But he [Stephen], being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, 'Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!'" (Acts 7:55-56)

In the moments just before death, Stephen was granted a vision of Christ in glory at the right hand of God. His prayer, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit," expressed his assurance that immediately upon the death of his body, his spirit would ascend into heaven into the presence of God.

Paul returns to the same thought in Philippians, where he weighs the relative merits of being released by death from his physical body or of remaining longer in his body in order to complete his earthly ministry.

> "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labour; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. For I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you." (Phil. 1:21-24)

Here Paul considers two alternatives before him:

1. To remain in the flesh – that is, to continue longer in his present life here on earth in his physical body, or,
2. To depart and be with Christ – that is, for his spirit to be released from his body by death and thus to enter directly into the presence of Christ in heaven.

These examples of Stephen and Paul make it plain that, when a true Christian in this present dispensation dies, his spirit is released from his body and goes immediately and directly into the presence of Christ in heaven. This direct access for the Christian believer into the presence of God in heaven has been made possible only through the death and resurrection of Christ, by which full and final atonement has been made for sin.

Prior to Christ's atonement, the departed spirits of the righteous were consigned to a special area in Sheol, the netherworld. This special area was a place of rest and comfort, not of torment or punishment. Nevertheless, it was far removed from the immediate presence of God.

We may now apply the conclusions we have reached to the doctrine of the resurrection. The pattern for the resurrection of all men is set by the resurrection of Christ Himself. That is to say, the departed spirit is called forth from the place to which it has been consigned by the sentence of God – whether in the realm of heaven or of the netherworld. At the same time, the body is raised up by resurrection from death. Spirit and body are thus reunited, and the complete personality of man is reconstituted.

Devotional

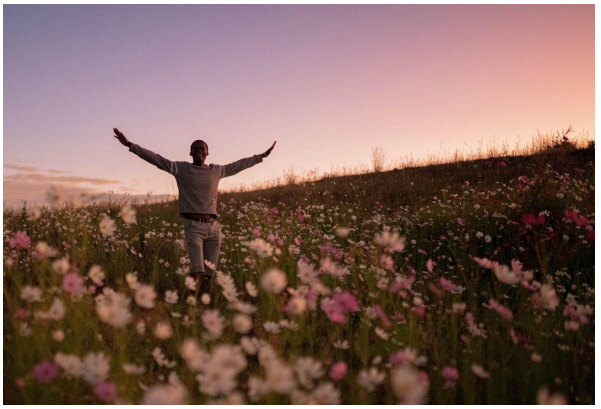
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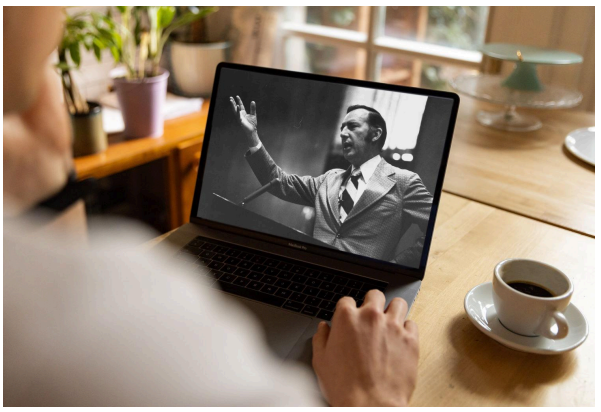
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