

What Comes After Death? (Part 2)



Victory Over Death (Part 9)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again, as we continue to study together a theme that is of such tremendous personal importance to each one of us, the theme of "Victory Over Death."

Yesterday, I began to deal with a subject that always captivates man's imagination, "What Comes after Death." We looked at some pictures that the Bible gives of what happens to men's souls after death, as they pass out into the unseen world. We saw that certain features recur in the various passages:

First of all, there is some recollection of previous conditions on earth.

Second, there is a definite persistence of personality.

Third, there is a recognition of one person by another.

Fourth, there is communication between one person and another.

Fifth, there is an awareness of present conditions in the unseen world, and

Sixth, there is some kind of correspondence with their previous state on earth; for example, those who were kings on earth are still recognized as kings in the unseen world.

However, there was one important feature further revealed by Jesus Himself in the story of Lazarus and the rich man; that is, that there was complete and permanent separation between the souls of the righteous and the souls of the unrighteous. The souls of the righteous were in a place of rest entitled Abraham's bosom, but the souls of the unrighteous were in a place of imprisonment and torment.

Today I'm going to explain how, after the death of Jesus, while His body lay in the tomb, His soul descended into Hades and, as a result, certain important and permanent changes took place. The record of these events is found primarily in the first epistle of Peter. We need to look at two distinct statements:

First of all, in 1 Peter 3:18-20:

> "For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water." (NAS)

So that speaks about Christ, in the spirit, still not in His body, descending into Hades, and describes how He made a proclamation to the spirits of unrighteous persons who were in prison; the particular persons specified were those who had been disobedient to God and broken God's laws in the days of Noah.

The second passage in 1 Peter is in 4:6:

> "For the gospel has for this purpose been preached even to those who are dead, that though they are judged in the flesh as men, they may live in the spirit according to the will of God." (NAS)

Now this is not the same as the previous statement; there is an important difference. Different words are used in the Greek; in the first passage, it says that "Jesus made a proclamation," but in the second passage, it says: "The gospel was preached." The gospel, of course, is the good news that always centers around the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Now, what was the difference and what exactly happened. I believe it was this way. Let's look, first of all, at what happened to the righteous believers in Abraham's bosom. To them, Jesus brought good news: the gospel. The good news was: the price for sin has now been paid by my death and my shed blood. Consequently, God is now prepared to give you complete pardon and to release you from this place of waiting. Their bodies had suffered sin's penalty, which was death, but their souls received God's pardon through their faith in Jesus.

Now, let's look at what happened to the unrighteous in prison. Jesus made to them a proclamation. So far as I know, there is nowhere in the Bible that tells us what this proclamation was. I like to phrase it in terms such as this: Jesus said, "This place in now under new management." Why do I say that? Well, let's look at what Jesus says to John on the island of Patmos when He appears to him in His glory. In Revelation 1:17 & 18, John says:

> "And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as a dead man, And He laid His right hand upon me, saying, 'Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.'" (NAS)

So by His death and by propitiatory sacrifice, Jesus earned the right to wrest from the hand of those two satanic angels, Death and Hades, the keys to that place of imprisonment. Consequently, from then on, Jesus had the right and the ability to release those who had been pardoned and to liberate them. This He did; then, when He ascended out of Hades, then ascended right into heaven, he took with Him the liberated souls from Abraham's bosom. This is referred to in Ephesians 4:8-10:

> "Therefore it says, 'When He ascended on high, [that's Jesus] He led captive a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men.' [that was those who were the captives of Hades, became Jesus' captives through His atoning sacrifice, and through the price that He paid of His shed blood; he obtained the rights to release those captives, and take them with him when he ascended up on high. Paul makes it clear that this is what he is referring to because he goes on in the next two verses;] (Now this expression, 'He ascended,' what does it mean except that he also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)" (NAS)

So, Jesus, after descending to the lower part of the earth and bringing the good news of release to the captives in Abraham's bosom, released them using the keys of Death and of Hades, which He has received; and then, when He ascended up on high into the Heaven of God's presence, He took them with Him. He led captivity captive, He led captive a host of captives.

This is also described in Matthew 27:51-53, speaking about the death of Jesus on the cross and the events that followed. It said:

> "And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom, and the earth shook; and the rocks were split, and the tombs were opened; and many bodies of

> the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; [That's the first resurrection of believers that's recorded.] and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many." (NAS)

That's the host of captives whom Jesus liberated. In Hebrews 11:40, we are told about the Old Testament saints in comparison with the New Testament saints. "God had provided something better for us, that's the saints of the New Testament, so that, apart from us, they, the Old Testament saints, should not be made perfect." Only after the death and resurrection of Jesus could the Old Testament saints enter into that which they had been believing and trusting for and waiting to see accomplished, which was fulfilled when Jesus came down into their place of imprisonment and released them and took them with Him.

As a result of the death and resurrection of Jesus, and the events that we have just been looking at, the whole situation for righteous believers since that time has been radically changed. From then onwards, righteous believers no longer descend after death into a place of waiting and kind of imprisonment, but have direct access to the presence of God in Heaven.

The first clear example of this is the first martyr, Stephen. His martyrdom is described in Acts 7:55 & 56. The writer of Acts says:

> "But being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, 'Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.'" (NAS)

Then again, in verses 59 & 60, it says:

> "And they went on stoning Stephen as he called upon the Lord and said, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!' And falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them!' And having said this, he fell asleep." (NAS)

We see there, that at this point, just before death, Stephen had a clear vision into the world beyond into the heavenlies. He saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and He knew that was where He was going. And His prayer was: "Receive my spirit." He did not go down into Sheol or to Hades, but his spirit was taken straight up into the presence of the Lord.

Then we can look at the testimony of Paul. In 2 Corinthians 5:6 & 8, Paul says this:

> "Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord, we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord." (NAS)

We see that for Paul there were two alternatives. As long as he was at home in the body, he was absent from the Lord, but the moment that he became absent from the body, he would be home with the Lord. There was no question of his going down into Sheol or Hades. Again, his testimony in Philippians 1:21-24:

> "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake." (NAS)

You see that Paul saw two clear alternatives set before him there. The one was to remain living in the flesh, which would benefit the Christians amongst whom he was working; the other, which he himself preferred, was to depart and to be with Christ.

So, the death of Jesus Christ on the cross, and the shed blood that purchased our redemption, has radically changed the destiny of righteous believers. From that time onwards, it's no longer a question of going down into Sheol and waiting there in Abraham's bosom for the hour of release and redemption. But now the spirits of the righteous, through faith in Jesus, having been made righteous with His righteousness, redeemed with His blood, have immediate access into the heavenlies. And it's indicated in the book of Revelation that there is a paradise, a garden of rest in the heavenlies, to which these righteous souls have access.

We might conclude today with that Scripture in 1 Corinthians 15:55:

> "O death, where is your victory? O Death, where is your sting?" (NAS)

The death and resurrection of Jesus robbed death of its victory and of its sting. How thankful we should be to God for all that's been purchased for us by the death of Jesus.

Well, our time is up for today. I'll be back with you again tomorrow at this time.

Today, we've seen what happens to the souls of the righteous after the death of the body. Tomorrow we'll look at the next great phase of God's program, the reuniting of soul and body at the resurrection.

Radio Program

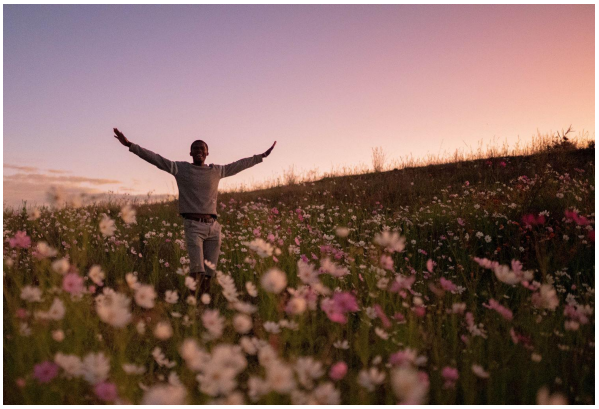
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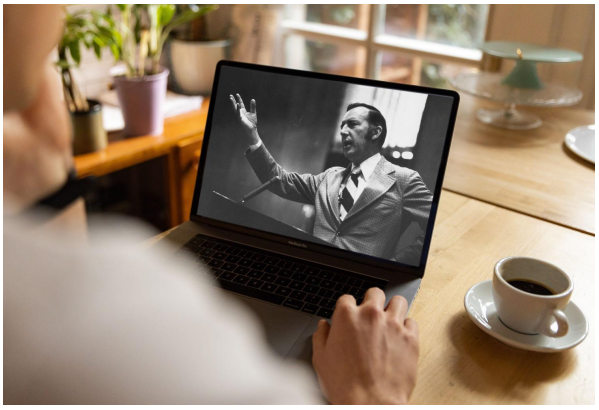
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