

Life After Death, Pt. 3

Life After Death

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Bible Text: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

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The book of Revelation in chapter seven. I will be reading verse 13 to the end.

And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.¹

If you would now turn to 1 Thessalonians chapter four, please, beginning in verse 13 and we are reading 13 to the end of the chapter.

But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.²

We are continuing our series on the book of Revelation and we are in a mini series, if you will, on the afterlife. Now, today we are going to be looking into some of the deep things of God, some mysteries that are secrets... the secrets and the answers to are only hinted at in the Bible, a word here, a phrase there. So it wouldn't be right to draw conclusions

¹ Revelation 7:13-117.

² 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

form skimpy evidence and certainly would be wrong to build doctrine out of such shaky foundations. But the hints are very intriguing. I am going to be using qualifying words like possible, perhaps. In one or two cases I will probably use the word likely. But if some of what I am about to say about the after life seems far fetched to you, then reject it. Be a Berean. As we have often said, go to the Scriptures. I will try not to say anything.... I always try not to say anything that can't be supported, I don't support by the Scriptures. But be a Berean.

I once thought that life after death was shrouded in mystery. I thought that the teaching of the Bible was pretty much limited to the fact that Christians go to heaven when they die and unbelievers go to hell. And other than that, we don't really know. But the passage from 1 Thessalonians we just read says that it is the Lord's will that Christians know much more than that. The Holy Spirit, speaking through the apostle Paul, makes that clear. The after life is not supposed to be a total mystery. It is our responsibility to learn as much as possible about it from the Bible.

We are commanded here in 1 Thessalonians not to be ignorant about it. And if you remember in Revelation, the early part of Revelation we are promised a blessing if we read the book of Revelation and hear it read. And much of the book of Revelation is about the after life.

The reason why we are not supposed to be ignorant about it, well, they are given right in what we just read, so we have hope and we don't grieve like unbelievers who have no hope after death, who think that, you know, you just go out of existence or something.

And also so we can comfort each other. Brothers and sisters in Christ comforting one another when the shadow of death appears in our lives as it does for everyone either for people you know or your loved ones or yourself.

So as we continue this series on death and the after life within our larger series on the book of Revelation, I want to go back and re-emphasize a key point. Otherwise we will get off track if we don't have this firmly anchored.

A lot of Christians think that when a believer dies they go directly to heaven and they are there forever. Well, if we belong to Christ, we immediately go to heaven. As I said last week, that is temporary. It is not our permanent condition. It is the temporary heaven right now or the intermediate heaven. It is not the normal condition for us. It is not the final state.

At the last day when Jesus returns to earth to put an end to time and the created universe, that is, as it is now, believers will be resurrected and these will be glorified bodies and our spirit in heaven will be joined to our resurrected body.

That is the condition in which believers in Christ will then live forever with the Lord. Also at that time the new earth will be created. And the Bible says that is where we will live forever.

So when we speak of heaven—and we are going to be looking at the new earth, I think, Lord willing, in later weeks—when we speak of heaven where those who die in Christ are right now, we are speaking of a temporary, the intermediate, the transitional state.

Now some people have a lot of trouble believing that heaven exists because they can't see it. Now some of these people don't believe in God for the same reason. I am sure you have met people who say, "Well, show me God. You know, I don't believe in God because I can't see God."

Well, heaven right now is invisible to us because we see through our physical, material eyes. And we know that our eyes can see, for example, only a small part of the visible light spectrum. You knew that, right? There is a lot more to be seen just in the visible light spectrum than our eyes can see.

Do you think that because you can't see something therefore it is not real, you make a mistake most children would not make.

So if that is your thinking, you would have to believe that error does not exist. Oxygen does not exist. All of these various invisible gases don't exist, that light waves don't exist. Therefore light, then, doesn't really exist, radio and satellite and television waves and cell phone reception. That is all impossible since they are all carried by light waves.

Mathematics is invisible. What we think of as mathematics are only the symbols that man has invented to represent mathematics, but the actual mathematics is invisible. Therefore you would have to say, if you think that... if you can't see it you don't believe it, mathematics doesn't exist. Atoms and molecules, they can't exist because you can't see them. There is no star beyond the reach of our telescopes because you can't see it. Music can't exist. You can't see music. You can see what is written on a page, but you can't actually see music. You would even have to say that because they are invisible, logic and thoughts and yes, even love doesn't exist, because you can't see it. You can't see logic. You can't see thoughts. You can't see love.

So like all these and a lot more I haven't mentioned, heaven is real. Angels, souls, God are both invisible and very, very real.

Or, as C S Lewis said, "I believe in Christianity as I believe the sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else."

See, heaven is normally invisible to us, but there are times when the Lord opens some people's eyes and lets them see heaven.

Please turn to Acts chapter seven. Acts chapter seven verse 55, this is Stephen, the apostle Stephen.

Ok. Acts chapter seven beginning at verse 55.

But he [Stephen] being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.³

This was not a spiritual vision. The Bible plainly says he looked up to heaven and he saw what he saw, just as he saw anything else with his eyes. And Paul speaks of being brought into heaven in 2 Corinthians chapter 12. And, of course, John sees much of heaven in the book of Revelation.

But particularly with Stephen here, he was standing there and he looked up to heaven and saw... And God opened heaven for his eyes to see.

I mentioned light waves and about our eyes not being able to see the hole spectrum of light, just a small part of it. Now just think about it if we could see the entire spectrum. Our field of vision would be bombarded. If you could see in this room all of the electrical waves and the light waves that are... that we can't see, ultraviolet light, infrared light and, of course, radio and TV waves and cell phones and satellite waves and power line leakage and gamma rays and who knows what else all around us. It is a good thing we can't see all that stuff bouncing around as we couldn't see the world. It would just be a bunch of rays. So that is a good thing.

Now I am speculating, ok? I want to speculate here. Is it not possible that angels exist within the spectrum of light that is normally invisible to us? We are never told that angels are spirits, only that God is a spirit. And angels appear to have characteristics of spirits, but there are times when they are made visible to men.

When the Lord sends angels to his people as he did when he... remember Lot. The angels came to rescue, pick Lot out of Sodom before it was destroyed. He sent angels to the Lord himself accompanied, apparently by angels, to Abraham and Sarah and their tent. Remember when Elisha prayed and his servant's eyes were opened to see the hill side's covered with angels. Could it be that the Lord adjusts our vision or adjusts their placement in the spectrum so they become visible to us?

Does the fact that our eyes can only see a small part of the visible spectrum keep us from seeing them? And to think this through a bit further, does this explain in some way the nature of the resurrected body? Remember, Jesus in his resurrected body was both physical and yet could pass through solid objects.

My point is that we shouldn't... whether you believe this or not, the point is we should not automatically jump to the conclusion that because angels and souls and heaven are spiritual, if angels are entirely spiritual, that therefore that must mean they haven't some kind of existence that we could call physical? Perhaps the word "physical" is inadequate. Maybe tangible existence is more accurate. Maybe tangible and spiritual aren't

³ Acts 7:55-56.

necessarily exclusive. I don't know. I said I am trying to speculate here somewhat which is always dangerous.

You know, as you may remember, I majored in philosophy in college. And I was encouraged by the chairman of the philosophy department to pursue my studies and get a doctorate and teach philosophy. I went on that course until I realized that philosophy is intellectually bankrupt. It is, you know, it is very interesting to study, but if you are hungering and thirsting for truth you won't find it in philosophy. It is fascinating, but it is empty, sort of like the saga of Anna Nicole Smith, interesting, but pointless.

I tell you this to suggest to you that I know a little bit about Plato. And Plato's thought largely governs the Christian Church in the 21st century.

Now could Plato who lived so long ago govern the thought or influence the thought of the Christian Church today?

Well, you will recognize it. Plato said that matter is inherently evil in what he called the forms, that is abstract entities that exist independently of the world, of the sensible world, the world of our senses. They are inherently good. So the early Christian church was heavenly influenced by Platonism. They attempted to Christianize Platonism and the result was a mess. They taught that anything spiritual is inherently good and anything material is inherently evil.

And today many Christians are Platonists, even if they don't even know who Plato was or what he taught. You can recognize a Christian Platonist when he tells you that heaven can't be physical in any possible sense, that people in heaven can't have bodies or eat food or, in fact, they don't do anything, because anything that smacks of the physical is unspiritual. Basically it is dirty and most basically evil. So when Christians think that way they are showing how they are influenced by Platonism.

Now Plato is not someone you want to emulate. He was a pagan. He was a homosexual. He was a pedophile and he is in hell right now. So the fact that he is held up as a great thinker speaks volumes about our culture and our educational system.

So contrary to Platonism in the resurrection, our fleshly physical bodies are redeemed to join with our already redeemed souls. Jesus, after his resurrection, remained on earth for 40 days.

In 1 Corinthians 15:20 it says, "Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept."⁴

That means he is the first to be resurrected from the dead—as we all will be—and he showed us what our resurrected body will be like. When Lazarus was resurrected from the dead he didn't a glorified body. He got his old body back. Basically it was restored, but it wasn't any glorified body. Christ's is the first one to have the resurrected, glorified

⁴ 1 Corinthians 15:20.

body. And this body is physical, yet it is also beyond physical. And he said in Luke 24:39... let's take a look at that, please. Luke... this is a very, very key verse to understand this and I, frankly... it was... the more I looked at it, the more I realized how I had never really paid much attention to it before.

In Luke chapter 24 when Jesus first came to them, to the apostles after he had been crucified and buried and it starting at verse 36 in Luke 24.

“And as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them.”⁵

So they were around speaking and all of the sudden he was there. He didn't come and knock on the door or anything. He was just there.

And saith unto them, Peace be unto you. But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit. And he said unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have. And when he had thus spoken, he shewed them his hands and his feet. And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here any meat? And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb. And he took it, and did eat before them.⁶

And it goes on. But the point is about his body, this glorified body that he had.

This proves that Platonism contradicts the Bible. He says, “It is I myself.”⁷

Jesus said just because his fleshly body had died, it did not matter. He was still himself. It is me. It is me. Just because my body died, I am still here. It is myself. It is I myself.

He knew his friends. He talked. He reasoned. He said he had flesh and bones. These are resurrected flesh and bones, but he said, “I have flesh and bones as you see me have.”

He said to his disciples, “If you don't believe it, prove it to yourself. Touch me. Feel me.”

So this proves Platonism contradicts the Bible. The physical is not evil. We will have physical bodies on the new earth. You know, we will talk more about that later.

If you think as a Platonist which, as, in fact, did a lot of the Church, you will take all the Bible verses that talk about the physical resurrection or that talk about heaven and the new earth and you just take the book of Revelation, too, and Daniel and parts of Isaiah and Ezekiel and just spiritualize them all away in some soupy, meaningless, emotional

⁵ Luke 24:36.

⁶ Luke 24:36-43.

⁷ Luke 24:39.

fog. And that is what a lot of sermons, that is why a lot of sermons in the evangelical church are such a wimpy mess. They reflect the theology of the preachers. Everything is Platonized, spiritualized away into meaningless gibberish. The truth is heaven is more solidly real than earth. It is not the other way around.

Now think about that. Why wouldn't it be? Why wouldn't it be?

If you have been influenced by Platonism, what do you do with a verse like Hebrews eight? Flip over to Hebrews, please. In Hebrews eight in the middle of verse four, just because it is...

Skipped over [?].

Ok, Hebrews eight middle of verse four.

“...there are priests that offer gifts according to the law.”⁸

Verse five.

“Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things.”⁹

Ok. The New King James is a little clearer on that.

“There are priests who offer the gifts according to the law; who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things.”¹⁰

This clearly declares the Old Testament system as a copy and shadow of the things in heaven. So the things in heaven are the solid reality and the things on earth are the copies and shadows. That is a mind blowing concept.

Exodus 25:4 which is quoted here in Hebrews 8:5 says that Moses was instructed... ok, as in verse five here.

“...as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount.”¹¹

Moses... and that is a quotation of Exodus 25:4. Moses was instructed to build a tabernacle according to the pattern that God showed him from heaven on Mount Sinai. So the solid reality was in heaven. And God gave Moses its pattern, its blue print so he could construct a copy on earth.

⁸ Hebrews 8:4.

⁹ Hebrews 8:5.

¹⁰ Hebrews 8:4-5.

¹¹ Hebrews 8:5.

And that is not all. In the New Testament in Hebrews 9:24 it says, “Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands,”¹² if you want to look at that. It should be on probably the same or the next page, 24.

“Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true.”¹³

The New King James says, “copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.”¹⁴

The very holy places, the Old Testament tabernacle, the temple are simply copies of the true ones, the reality. Not only is the original in heaven, but it is called the true. The holy places made with human hands, the tabernacle, the temple are copies. And they are not called the true. Of course they are inferior. Even though Moses constructing the tabernacle and Solomon building the temple followed the blueprint God had given them, they were still made by men, sinful men’s hands, so they are inferior to the true tabernacle and temple which is the original from which the blueprints were given from God to them.

So the Bible says, plainly, the Old Testament sanctuary on earth was a copy of the real one in heaven just as Hebrews 12:22 teaches that the new Jerusalem is presently in heaven.

In Revelation 2:7 Jesus says, “To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.”¹⁵

I want you to think of the implications of all of that.

Isn’t it possible? Is it possibly likely that the tree of life, which was a physical tree in the physical Garden of Eden, exists physically in heaven?

Jesus said, “The tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God.”¹⁶

What right do we have to assume that that is not literally true that the tree of life can’t possibly be literally physically in the midst of paradise now? Jesus said it is there. Yes, he sometimes spoke in parables. But if you know anything at all about parables, you know this statement is in no way a parable.

So we don’t dare assume Jesus spoke anything but the literal truth when he told the thief on the cross, “To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.”¹⁷

¹² Hebrews 9:24.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Revelation 2:7.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Luke 23:43.

We don't dare say, "Well, he didn't mean the thief would literally be with him in paradise." Nobody says that. That would be calling Jesus a liar.

So how could we dare to assume he isn't speaking the literal truth when he says the tree of life is in the midst of paradise?

Now, if we take Jesus at his Word that the tree of life is in the middle of paradise, there is a very interesting possibility. We know that the tree of life was where? The Garden of Eden. We know that the tree of life by its very name can never die. So it must still be in existence somewhere. We know if we take the Lord Jesus at his Word that the tree of life is in the midst of paradise. Could it be then the Garden of Eden still exists?

Let's go back to Genesis chapter three and take a look at something. In Genesis chapter three beginning in verse 22, this is when the Lord drives Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden after they have sinned. Genesis three beginning in verse 22.

And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever: Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.¹⁸

Does it say the Garden of Eden was destroyed? No. Only that no man or at least no unredeemed man can enter it. It is guarded.

By the way, there are possible references to Eden still existing. I will give you these references later, Genesis 4:16, Exodus 31:9 and 31:16 and Joel chapter two verse three.

In Revelation 22:2 John sees the tree of life in the midst of the new Jerusalem, not a tree of life. It says the tree of life in Revelation 22:2, the very same tree of life that can never die that was in the Garden of Eden. There is only one tree of life.

So let's put all these verses together. Since the tree of life still exists and there is no biblical evidence that the Garden of Eden was destroyed and Jesus said in Revelation 2:7 that the tree of life is in the midst of paradise and John sees the tree of life in the new Jerusalem, could Eden, the Garden of Eden now exist in paradise, that is, the present intermediate heaven where saved ones go when they die? And, furthermore, is it part of the Jerusalem that will come down from heaven on the last day? Isn't it possible that the new Jerusalem, which we know will come down from heaven on the last day as it says in Revelation 21, physically exists right now? Are our friends and loved ones who died in the Lord in the new Jerusalem right now as we all will be some day?

¹⁸ Genesis 3:22-24.

One more thing that adds to the equation and makes it even more thought provoking, the Septuagint is the Greek translation, as you may know, of the Hebrew Old Testament. It was in use at the time of Jesus. In Genesis the Greek word παραδεισος (par-ad'-i-sos) is used for the name of the Garden of Eden. Why? Because παραδεισος (par-ad'-i-sos) literally means royal garden, that is the king's garden. So it was translated as Garden of Eden.

Now, follow this, please. The New Testament writers wrote in Greek. In Luke 23:43 where Jesus says to the repentant thief on the cross, "To day shalt thou be with me in paradise,"¹⁹ the Greek word we see translated "paradise" in our English Bible is, yes, παραδεισος (par-ad'-i-sos).

So in the Old Testament παραδεισος (par-ad'-i-sos) is the word of the Garden of Eden and in the New Testament it is translated paradise. Thus, "To day shalt thou be with me in paradise,"²⁰ is the same as "To day shalt thou be with me in [the king's garden, the Garden of Eden]."²¹

One of my favorite books is *The Great Divorce*. Anybody ready that? C S Lewis? Yeah, good.

It begins with the writer in a depressing, filthy town. The name of the town is called Greytown. He boards a bus to take a trip. And much to his surprise he finds that the farther the bus goes the more he and the other passengers start to physically fade away, becoming more and more ghost like. And when they arrive at their destination, which is the most beautiful place they have ever seen, they discover they have all turned into ghosts. Everything in this place, the meadows, the trees, the hills, even the streams of water are more solid than they are. They can barely walk in the grass because the blades are so hard they poke into their skin. The water is solid. They can't put their hand in the water.

One of them tries to pick an apple and he can't hold it. It is too heavy.

Then they are approached by shining figures, which, as they come closer, they recognize as their friends and their loved ones who have died. Then they find out this place where they are at is the outskirts of heaven. And these people have come to meet them to urge them to repent of their sins and continue their journey to enter heaven itself. They are told that the pain and discomfort they are having will go away when they enter heaven.

But most of the people have all sorts of reasons why they can't do that. They have to get back on the bus and they have to get back to Greytown.

¹⁹ Luke 23:43.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

Some people say, “Well, my business needs me and my family needs me.” And others miss their amusements and their entertainments. All have their own excuses as to why they can’t go on and they have to return to Greytown.

And what they don’t know is that Greytown is hell. So one of Lewis’ points is that what we think of as solid and real is, in fact, a ghostly copy, a shadow of the true reality which is in heaven, just as we read from the Scriptures. That is why the closer the bus passengers get to heaven, the more they fade into ghosts. The earth is simply the shadow of heaven. The closer the inhabitants of earth get to heaven the more it is like a shadow coming in to the sunlight.

Comparing what we see on earth to what heaven will be like, Lewis wrote, “The hills and valleys of heaven will be to those you now experience on earth not as a copy is to the original, nor as a substitute to the genuine article, but as the flower is to the root or the diamond is to the lump of coal.”

So why should we think that heaven is a copy of earth and not the other way around? Isn’t it more biblical to believe that the things of earth are a shadow, a copy of heaven?

As Moses was instructed to make a tabernacle on earth and Solomon was instructed to build a temple after the heavenly pattern, the blue print of what was already in heaven?

Could it be even the hills and the valleys and the villages and the cities of earth are copies of the perfect hills and valleys and villages and streams and cities in heaven? There is so much more we can learn from the Bible about the present heaven and the new earth to come.

We are not going to make the mistake of Platonism. If the physical on earth is only a copy and shadow of the reality in heaven, if heaven is the real reality and earth only its copy, its shadow, isn’t it probable that the reality in heaven is more physical whatever that may mean? That is what we see and experience on earth is, as it were, hidden and covered and that the afterlife in heaven is the uncovered true reality?

As Jesus promised in Matthew 10:26, “For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known.”²²

“But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.”²³

Let’s go to him in prayer.

²² Matthew 10:26.

²³ 1 Peter 4:13.