

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN CHRISTIANS DIE?

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Abstract

Dead is often avoided to be talked by many people whether in West or East culture because by some people have been described as a dark and sad situation. It brings people living in fear, hopeless, and even do not want to accept the reality that every person is going to die someday. Some of them tried to avoid it by not talking it, others spent a lot of money by consuming medicines improperly and also there are group of people also want to make their death's bodies to be fragmented so that in the future if scientist found solutions then the death bodies can be awoken again. It will drive many people into uncertainty, hopeless and problems in the future by believing those beliefs.

This paper is trying to help people to see that the Bible describes of the clarity and certainty on what happens when Christian die which the Bible portrays Christians or believer will continue to live in the blessedness with glorious body and abundance life with father in Heaven. It can be seen by looking it in biblical and theological understanding of each passage in the Bible where mentioned about life after death.

Keywords: *Life, Death, Instantaneous, Resurrection*

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of making this paper is to make clarity and certainty on the question What Happens When Christians Die? What are the major views concerning what happens to Christians when they die? Will there be a time of “soul sleep?” Will we be in some sort of a disembodied state until the end of the age? Are we immediately resurrected into a new body fit for eternity?

The Notion of Soul-Sleeping

This notion believes that when Christian die, the soul will enter a state of unconsciousness and remain in that state until the day of Christ’s second coming and the resurrection.¹ The body and soul will sleep or rest for a “while” in unconsciousness condition. There will be no more activities or continuation neither body and soul. This point of view comes from the understanding that “a human does not consist of body and soul rather human person, body, and soul are one and the same entity. Thus, when the body ceases to function, the soul (i.e., the whole person) ceases to exist”.²

The groups who believe in that view are Anabaptist, Seventh-Day Adventists and Jehovah’s Witnesses and may be some other denominations. They use several scriptural verses that expresses death as sleep (Matthew 27:52; Luke 8:52; John 11:11-13; Acts 7:60; 1

Corinthians 7:39; 15:6, 18; 1 Thessalonians 4:13 and also verses from the Old Testament such as Genesis 47:30; Deuteronomy 31:16; 2 Samuel 7:12; Psalm 30:91; 115:17; 146:4; Ecclesiastes 9:10; Isaiah 38:18, 19 that say the dead have no consciousness.⁶⁴ Do these passage really express the totally cease of body and soul? That passages should not be described as the totally cease of the whole life. Many believe that verses express the ceasing of a person of doing labor in this world. In other word the body of human stop doing or activities but not with the soul. The next question then, could a “soul” still consciousness exists without flesh-body?

William gives an interesting answer on this “consciousness can exist apart from sense-experiences. God has no body, neither do the angels have no bodies. Nevertheless, both God and the angels have consciousness”.³ Moreover, they are many problems also that coming on this view. First, Jesus teaches the continuation of soul or consciousness after a person died.

For example, When Jesus mentioned the story of Lazarus which expresses the continuation life of Lazarus on the bosom of Abraham enjoying the blessedness when he die and at the same time also explains the continuation and condition of life in the of the rich person when he die (Luke 16:19-31), the story when Jesus said to the person who crucified with Jesus but believe in him and

¹ William Hendriksen, *The Bible on the Hereafter* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 53.

² Erickson, Millard J.. *Christian Theology* (p. 1079).

Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

³ William., 54

Jesus says to that person that today or soon after he die will be with Jesus in the paradise (Luke 23:43) are significantly describing the continuation activities of soul whether believer or unbeliever in a different place.

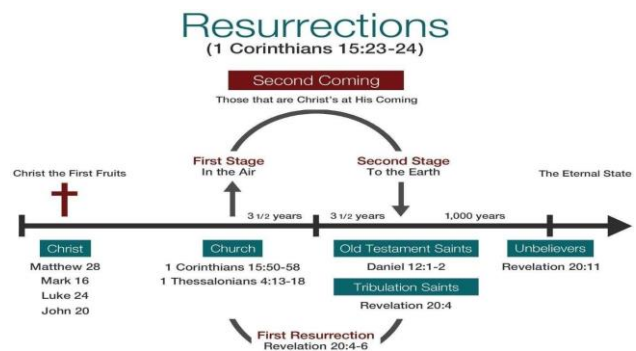
Purgatory

Roman Catholics was the source of this notion. Purgatory defines as redeemed persons undergo a transformative purification between death and eternal blessedness, thereby becoming fit for the holiness of God.⁴ It is a suffering place to those who die at peace with the church, and not in a state of mortal sin are purified and made fit for heaven.⁵ It can be said that the last place and chance after die to go to expiate the sins for which they have not done sufficient penance in this world.⁶ When a person die suddenly it goes to the section that called on God’s determined. Purgatory believed based on the scripture that mentioned in Hebrews 9: 27: “People are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.” It seems that they believe the judgment time will be done rightly when a person dies.

Interestingly, it is believed that there is still a chance for a wicked person to be saved even when they already die or in purgatory. Praying and do good works from others to a person in purgatory will able to save that person

from the power of judgment. It seems a similar to the notion of Islam or even Buddha which believe by praying or doing good works from the people who are still alive for the person that already die can be really helpful to save them. Then salvation here looks like “transactional” rather than relational reason as taught in the Bible. It seems illogical to believe that finite things such good works from finite people can result infinite things such salvation and eternity. Then, the person who is able to do that must be greater than human, unlimited and perfect. Only God who is infinite person and only by his grace alone person can be saved. It is not by works (Ephesians 2:8).

Instantaneous Resurrection of the Body



People in this view believe that immediately upon death, the believer receive the resurrection body that has been promised.⁷ There will be consciousness or continuation of life after leaving the body when a person die.

⁴ Garwood P. Anderson, “Purgatory,” ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

⁵ Alan Cairns, *Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Belfast; Greenville, SC: Ambassador Emerald International, 2002), 353.

⁶ John Thein, *Ecclesiastical Dictionary: Containing, in Concise Form, Information upon Ecclesiastical, Biblical, Archæological, and Historical Subjects* (New York; Cincinnati; Chicago: Benziger Brothers, 1900), 595.

⁷ Erickson, Millard J. *Christian Theology* (p. 1083). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

As mentioned above, Jesus teaches clearly of what will occur rightly a person die as in the story of Lazarus and a rich person. Some says that it was just a parable which normally contains a meaning or interprets to understand the chronological of life after death.

However, the story above was very special because Jesus uses the real name and person that almost never Jesus does in the teaching or on the parable. Moreover, Jesus in that story describes showed the “chronological” or a narrative story on life after death. It can be seen from the steps of what was happening on the Lazarus circumstances after he died and at the same time Jesus also showed what was happening with the rich man. Jesus also says “today you will with me in paradise” to the person who was requested to be reminded by Jesus on the cross.

Some disagree with this “Consciousness” view because the reason people believe a person couldn’t be able to live or have consciousness without body. However, understanding that consciousness could work without flesh body is the problem here. God neither angels do not have body but they still have consciousness. The key here is the term of the absent of a “body” which believed as a very basic need to a person to be to live is to have a body. It is believed by this point of view that God will give directly give or change a person

to have “resurrected body”.⁸

Again, consciousness works as the result the combination between soul and resurrected body. God had prepared resurrected body. It is possible to say that God will give a new spiritual body that fit to the soul when a believer die. Paul saw and awaited about the “resurrected body” and excited to be able willing to be with God. Erickson mentioned that “Paul realizes that, having died and risen with Christ, he is already being transformed and will receive his new or heavenly body at the moment of physical death”.⁹

When people rose from the dead, he was with them in the journey but there was no one able to recognize as Jesus until he opens the eyes of the disciple. It is believed that Jesus had resurrected or used it.

That is the reason why many the disciples could not recognize Jesus at the time. It can be said that the “contract” between soul and physical body will be done when a person die and at the same time a “spiritual body” is waiting to join with the soul of believers to be able enjoy the blessedness that God has prepared. It may not the same body as a “flesh” but it is a glorious body! Therefore, there is no time for the body to wait for the second coming of Jesus instead it will be given when a person die!

⁸ Chart Picture taken from <https://ihcc.org/Resources/Message/3740>. (accessed on

Saturday 1 March 2017)

⁹ Ibid., 1083

The place between Death and Resurrection

When people die whether in righteous or wicked condition, they are not going directly to heaven or hell for the wicked. However, even in that place they could experience the blessedness for righteous or judgment for the wicked. For those who trust in Jesus blessedness can be experienced in “paradise” or “paradeisos” in Greek where it described in the OT as the garden of Eden or in NT called at Abraham’s bosom (Luke 16:19-31; 23:43). It is described by a historian:

“In Jewish literature from the centuries before Jesus, *paradeisos* is used in reference to the blissful place of the righteous dead (Testament of Levi 18:10–11; Psalms of Solomon 14:3; 1 Enoch 17–19; 60:8; 61:12). By the first century AD, the word likely became synonymous with “heaven,” as reflected in 2 Cor 12:4 and Rev 2:7.”¹⁰

Even though Paradise is not a heaven but it is place for people to experience blessedness or great or rest place described by Jesus. It may not perfect as the heaven that Jesus’s offer after his second coming but it described as beautiful place.

However, for the wicked or unbeliever that place called “Hades” which a temporal place before the second judgment given to the wicked or unbeliever. It is a horrible place or opposite condition of situation it paradise as described by a scholar:

“Originally the Greeks thought of Hades as simply the grave, a shadowy, ghostlike

existence that happened to all who died, good and evil alike. Gradually they and the Romans came to see it as a place of reward and punishment, an elaborately organized and guarded realm where the good were rewarded in the Elysian Fields and the evil were punished.”¹¹

It is totally describing as a cursed place. After the second judgment given then unbeliever or the wicked persons will be moved to Hell or “Gehenna” Greek which is eternal fire that initially a place made by God to punish evils not for humans (Mark 9: 43,48).

CONCLUSION

There are many great things ahead that awaiting for the righteousness that God prepared already when believer “check out” from this world. Even in a moment of waiting the judgment day believers who died in Christ will enjoy the continuation life and blessedness after leave death. However, unbeliever should receive or may be multiple punishment as the consequences. Therefore, Bible shows the clarity and the certainty process or conditions of the life after of the situations for the righteous of the wicked. Then, the wonderful certainty of life that Jesus has been prepared by God should drive to share this great and wonderful love that Jesus had been prepared to us whether today and the future should be announced and preached to the end of the earth!

¹⁰ John D. Barry et al., Faithlife Study Bible (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016), Lk 23:43.

¹¹ Peter H. Davids, “Hades,” Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 912.

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