

## V. Eternity in Biblical Perspective

*If I Should Die Before I Wake...*

“Death—What’s Next? – Part 2”

Luke 16

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I’d like to start by looking at Hebrews 12 and then we’ll get to Luke 16. You probably never realized how brilliant your mother or grandmother was, at least it was in my house. When I was growing up my grandmother would teach me Bible verses and songs. My mom and dad did too but my dad traveled a lot in minor league baseball so that meant my grandmother was with us a lot in my childhood. My wife and my grandmother are the two biggest arguments against total depravity that I’m aware of. I’m just amazed at what God has done in their lives, but my grandmother in particular as I was thinking about it. One of the things she taught me when she would put me to bed is the prayer that says;

*Now I lay me down to sleep,*

*I pray the Lord my Soul to keep;*

*If I should die before I wake,*

*I pray the Lord my Soul to take.*

This is the prayer I took a line from as the title of this series we are studying. This little prayer has wonderful theological precision that we betray sometimes, perhaps out of great motives but we still betray.

There have been many times I’ve been in a funeral setting where we are doing our best to give Biblical encouragement, not just euphemisms and platitudes and we’ll want to comfort the grieving as we say something like, “You’re loved one is with the Lord with new legs as they are running around with Him.” Yet the answer is no they are not, for the legs have been left in the grave because their bodies haven’t been transformed yet – ashes to ashes and dust to dust. There is coming a time where they will have a new body for a new heavens and a new earth but it’s not in the theological framework of what we call the intermediate state. What is the intermediate state?

I believe the mission of the church is to take the whole counsel of God, buttressed with the Gospel and teaching all that God has given to us and the mission is to make disciples through the ministry of Gospel evangelism to the world, the Gospel ministry of love to one another and the result is that you reach up in worship. Discipleship turns out those who know how to gather for worship and those who know how to live life for worship. Romans 12:1 says *[1] I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.* All of life becomes worship and that’s one of the things we do.

While the small group disciple making is the main delivery system of making disciples and the large group is the main delivery system of bringing the disciples together in worship, I want you to understand that worship is part of disciple making. Granted, it’s not the life on life you get from the small group or for a season or reason, but it sets up the contours. It is the Gospel cannonade that softens up the heart and redirects the mind. It is the preaching of the Word that is the primary means of grace, though not exclusive. That’s why I love to do expository preaching on Sunday mornings and then to be a part of disciple-making in your life is

to do topical expository preaching on Sunday nights. That is, to take the issues of the Christian life, go to the Word of God, not to proof text what I want to say but to find out what I need to say. What does the Bible say about this issue?

I believe the Bible tells us how to live for Christ and it also tells us how to die in Christ. Those who live by faith, die in faith. What is our only comfort in life and death according to the Heidelberg catechism question number one? It is Christ the Lord of glory and He tells us what we need to know. That is what we want to know. We want to know what He tells us about the stewardship of life and of death, for that is what we all face unless Jesus comes back first. When that last breath is taken, what happens? The body and the soul have separated. The body is laid aside until the sure and expectation of the resurrection that will take place at the coming of Christ, but the soul goes on to be with the Lord. What makes you, you is not your body. Your body can be set aside but you are still living.

When God made Adam from the ground, Adam was a corpse until He breathed into Him the breath of life. Adam then become with that soul a living being. Matthew 10:28 says *[28] And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.* So at death, what makes you, you, is now present with the Lord. What is it that you will be doing (enjoy and employ) until Christ comes back, in the presence of the Lord, between your death and coming into His presence, how you are to view that and we'll look at that in the coming studies.

In this study, I want to finish up the intermediate state. I like what Michael Rogers says about this and that is as soon as I say intermediate state you think of something less than blessed. I want you to know that it is glorious to be a Christian but when you die it gets better. It will be glorious to be in His presence but when He comes again and inaugurates the everlasting new heavens and new earth it will be even greater. Think of prophecy for a minute. There are many times does God make a prophecy and there will be an immediate fulfillment that will point to the ultimate fulfillment. It's the same thing when He tells us absent from the body is present with the Lord and the intermediate state is an immediate heaven, because even more glory is yet to come.

So what is that immediate heaven in the intermediate state? Let's look at Hebrews 12. This is the hall of faith chapter where all who lived by faith died by faith. Hebrews 12:22–24 says *[22] But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, [23] and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the **spirits** of the righteous made perfect, [24] and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.*

Realize in verse 22 that Jerusalem will not stay heavenly for ultimately it will come down into the new heavens and the new earth but in the intermediate state it is the heavenly Jerusalem. We see that innumerable angels will be there and believers which is signified by the term 'firstborn' which refers to status. The assembly of the firstborn refers to the church universal. We have all the rights of our Savior Jesus that He has given to us. Notice that in this intermediate state that you are in heaven with all the glory and joy but it's not the ultimate new heavens and new earth and you're not in your ultimate final state because according to verse 23 these are the spirits that are perfected in His presence. So the line in the prayer that says 'I pray the Lord my soul to take' is right.

The nonmaterial part of you, that makes you, you which is your spirit/soul that comes in the image of God does not die at your physical death. The body is set aside and you are now ushered into His presence for this spiritual existence in which you will enjoy with Him forevermore. This passage also tells us in verse 23 our spirit/soul will be perfected in His presence and to Jesus – absent from the body, present with the Lord (II Corinthians 5:8). In that immediate state you will see your glorified Savior with the marks of your redemption on His hands, His feet and His side. He is the Mediator who redeemed you and it is a better blood than the blood of Abel, because the blood of Abel was shed because of sin whereas the blood of Jesus was shed to save sinners. He is an atoning Christ and it is glorious. How will you be with Him? You will be with Him spiritually. Your body will be in the ground but it will not stay there. When Jesus returns your body will be raised into a new body for a new heavens and a new earth. Now I'd like to look at another text that looks at this same moment.

Let's look at Revelation 6 where the unfolding of the seven seals is taking place and it's clear here that every believer not only dies and goes into the presence of the Lord, but right now some are dying for the Lord. They are martyrs as they die for the faith. So what about these who have died for the faith? Revelation 6:9–11 says [9] *When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls (not the bodies) of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. [10] They cried out with a loud voice, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" [11] Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.*

The white robe referred to in Revelation 6:11 is also a reference to II Corinthians 5 where we set aside this tent (our bodies) and He has prepared a dwelling for us there. So we have this intermediate state that is spiritual which is clothed with what God has provided for us that declares our perfections. So the white robe is a spiritual symbol before Him and told to rest a little longer, showing how God has called some to martyrdom and not all have laid down their life in the work of the Gospel in this world. Those that have, their spirits are now with the Lord with the clothing He has provided that is rooted in the righteousness of Christ that clothes us for all eternity.

One of the greatest instruments of discipleship of Biblical truth that can be used is the Westminster Shorter Catechism. If it was used more we'd be more accurate in our times of communication in truth and love, because this subject has been addressed for us in the Westminster Shorter Catechism number 37 which is as follows;

**Q:** What benefits do believers receive from Christ at death?

**A:** The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory;<sup>1</sup> and their bodies, being still united to Christ,<sup>2</sup> do rest in their graves till the resurrection.<sup>3</sup>

1. Luke 23:43, Luke 16:23, Philippians 1:23, 2 Corinthians 5:6–8.

2. 1 Thessalonians 4:14.

3. Romans 8:23, 1 Thessalonians 4:14.

He is not through with us yet. Their bodies have been united to Christ even as it has been laid aside – ashes to ashes and dust to dust – waiting to be resurrected and transformed at His second coming when He brings the resurrection of the dead. So they have immediate blessings, comfort and presence with the Lord spiritually with their souls. Now let's look at another text with another perspective on it in II Corinthians 12.

So if I pulled up next to you at a stop light and one of your kids said ‘Hey look there is the pastor in his car’ would they be correct? Yes. Let’s say your spouse said ‘Hey there is the pastor in his automobile’ would they be correct? Yes. They would also be correct if they used the term vehicle. So here are three different terms referring to the same item. The intermediate state of the immediacy of being present with the Lord in all comfort and joy being perfected goes with multiple names in the Bible. There is this place of the dead, known as Sheol in the Old Testament and hades. It has two categories – one being the intermediate place of torment for the unbelievers which is also called the abyss. Then there is the intermediate place of blessing for the believers. It is called Abraham’s Bosom, heaven, paradise and we see this term when Jesus says to the thief on the cross ‘today you shall be with Me in paradise (Luke 23:43).

Now let’s look at II Corinthians 12 where Paul is defending his apostolic ministry. II Corinthians 12:1–5 says *[1] I must go on boasting. Though there is nothing to be gained by it, I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. [2] I know a man (Paul, referring to himself) in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. [3] And I know that this man was caught up into paradise—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows— [4] and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter. [5] On behalf of this man I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses.*

I think the third heaven is the immediate presence of the Lord. I believe there is the heavens and the earth. I believe there is the dwelling place of the angels, the second heavens, where they are also allowed into the third heavens and that is the throne setting. Although God is everywhere, there is a sense of His presence in all of His glory in which the angels must shield their eyes. They have six wings – two to stay suspended, two to shield their eyes and two to cover their feet. When Paul says ‘whether in the body or out of the body’ he is referring to his soul. As with a car having many words to describe it so here we see paradise and heaven used to describe the same thing. Both are referring to that place believers go into the presence of the Lord around the throne of the Lord.

Here Paul is caught up with a vision in his apostolic ministry that would have been appropriate to his calling as giving us Divine revelation of God’s Word. This account of him being caught up into the third heavens/paradise was so glorious that he doesn’t even know whether he was in his body or his soul had been transformed but he does know he was in the presence of the Lord. He tells us it was heaven and it was paradise. Who would have been there? Jesus, the thief on the cross and all the souls being perfected that had died to go into the presence of the Lord. One day if Jesus doesn’t come back first, you will be there.

Now let’s look at II Corinthians 5. This is not speculation because Paul starts off with ‘we know’ and don’t miss the metaphors in this passage. II Corinthians 5:1–10 says *[1] For we **know** that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed (referring to the body and death), we have a building (mansion, a place prepared for us, reference John 14) from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. [2] For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, [3] if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. [4] For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. [5] He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.*

*[6] So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, [7] for we walk by faith, not by sight. [8] Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. [9] So whether*

*we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please Him. [10] For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.*

We need to quit looking at the eternal through the earthly. The tent is the earthly body and the building/house God is preparing for us is a glorious palace. Our soul was not made and to exist without a clothing of a body which is what he is referring to in verse 3 and that's why this is an intermediate state. It is not made to simply exist with the soul or its spiritual state but when this one is put off we're found naked in anticipation of what we'll put on – the new body. The intermediate state is glorious but not final.

Can you not see why the education of our children is so crucial? Almost all of our children are being educated from Greek philosophy, a platonic view, in which when you die your soul has escaped from your body in that salvation. Paul is telling us here that we know that is not salvation. We are groaning to be delivered from the body under this curse but when we don't have a body that is not salvation but an intermediate state for we have an anticipation of a body being made for us for all of eternity. We are looking for the everlasting dwelling of a new body in a new heavens and a new earth. This intermediate state is better but not the final state that we have.

Paul further lets us know that while we are here we are away from Him so that when we die we will be with Him (II Corinthians 5:6) – absent from the body, present with the Lord. We will look at the Judgment Seat in a few studies from now because I don't have time to go through that at this point so hopefully I will answer your questions then about that. For now I want you to see Paul's abundant honesty in this passage. When I am away from this cursed body that I'm groaning to be delivered from, it's better to be with the Lord in the intermediate state for it's glorious. I'm saved, praise God! Jesus is with me by the Holy Spirit and I have the Spirit as a Guarantee that brings the presence of Christ into my life, but when I die it will be better. When I get what He is preparing for me in the new heavens and the new earth it will be even more glorious, but that doesn't mean in between is lacking. On the contrary it's better.

Yet we always have questions, like 'will I know so n' so, will I be married, will I drink express coffee, etc.' I know you have a lot of questions. What is bigger, a quarter or the sun? It is the sun but if I take the quarter and put it right in front of me what does it do to the sun? It blocks it out. We take what is here on earth and hold it so tight, it blocks out what He is trying to tell us about there – eternity and that's what happens to us. After my grandmother taught me the bedtime prayer she then taught me; "*What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love Him*"— (I Corinthians 2:9). Whatever it is that gives us joy in the intermediate state or the final state in His presence will all be there but I can also promise you that which will make it joy is Jesus. Sadly, we have a lot of quarters we put in front of that to block that out. You have to get a bigger Jesus to let you know where to put the quarters, then you will know how to handle that in terms of eternity.

Now let's look at Luke 16 which gives us insight into the death of the rich man and Lazarus in the intermediate state, where they find themselves. Luke 16:19–31 says [19] "*There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. [20] And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, [21] who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. [22] The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, [23] and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. [24] And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have*

*mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.’ [25] But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. [26] And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.’ [27] And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father’s house— [28] for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.’ [29] But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ [30] And he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ [31] He said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.’”*

Abraham’s side was a term used when those who died would say ‘lay me aside that I may rest with my fathers’ and so Abraham’s Bosom is used as a term for going to heaven. We see here that there are two places in the intermediate state – a place of blessing and a place of torment, the intermediate judgment. The rich man had his “good things” on earth but Lazarus received bad things on earth but that is not why Lazarus goes to heaven, for he is a believer like anyone else but believers on the way to heaven are not necessarily blessed with the wealth of this world, because they are put in positions to bear testimony before eternity that Christ is enough. So it would be with Lazarus.

In other words, Luke when recording this would have made sure you know that Jesus does not believe in the word of faith prosperity gospel, that name it and claim it. Lazarus’ call was in suffering. The rich man was the one who named it and claimed, and had nothing to do with the Lord so he is under judgment. Lazarus is in the presence of the Lord, even though in His walk with the Lord he did not have the things of this world. We see that there is no second opportunity after death for it’s fixed – there’s a chasm. We also see that on earth they have the Word of God which is a sufficient witness when it says Moses and the Prophets in verse 31. Yet there were people that came from the dead and there was no repentance. If they don’t listen to the Word they won’t adhere to the miraculous resurrection of the Savior. God has to change the heart for people to come to Christ.

Will we know one another in the intermediate state? According to this passage, yes, there will be recognition. Will we communicate with one another? Yes, there is communication. Another question you may have is, if you are in your spiritual existence with no body how am I going to recognize and communicate with others? Who else dwells in a spiritual state? It is the angels. Do they recognize one another and communicate? Yes, for the Bible is full of showing us this. Now this is where I stop because I can’t get beyond this. The soul/spirit is immaterial and angels are spirits made by God to serve Him. Since the angels can recognize and communicate so we will be able to do the same. How will we be able to do that? I can’t tell you that for I can only tell you that you do.

I want to make one more point from this passage. In the intermediate state there is no redemption and the torment here will not even bring someone to Godly repentance. You might be thinking ‘but isn’t the rich man in remorse here?’ Sure, he is but this is what is known as worldly sorrow, not Godly repentance. Godly repentance is being repentant over our sin and the sinfulness of our sins but the rich man doesn’t have this for he is only sorrowful over the consequences. We further see the rich man doesn’t have Godly repentance when he wants to send Lazarus to dip his finger. This man used Lazarus during his whole life and he still uses him for Lazarus is his water boy, even from hades and the abyss. The rich man is also basically

saying that God hasn't done enough to warn him about this torment and so he thinks he isn't responsible for why he is there. So now he wants God to do more for his five brothers. There is no repentance from this rich man.

When the Bible says those being cast into hell are weeping and gnashing of teeth, that is not repentance. It is not Biblical remorse. That would be more what a child does to show total depravity. It's called a temper tantrum. There is no repentance in hell. It's not you didn't get God here because you didn't want so now you get what you want when you get there. If that was true all God would have to do is set up the escalator and they could go onto eternal hell apart from Him. No, the Bible says He hurls them, He throws them into eternal condemnation. Nobody walks into it but neither does it bring repentance. Only the Gospel of grace will bring you to repentance to confess Christ as Lord and King.

Let's look at one more passage from Revelation 7 and then we'll conclude. Here we come to the end of the sixth seal in anticipation of the seventh seal which will be unfolded with seven trumpets and seven bowls of wrath as the book of Revelation keeps unfolding, but this will show us the intermediate state given to John in his vision. Revelation 7:9–17 says [9] *After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, [10] and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" [11] And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, [12] saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."*

*[13] Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?" [14] I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*

*[15] "Therefore they are before the throne of God,  
and serve Him day and night in His temple;  
and He who sits on the throne will shelter them with His presence.*

*[16] They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore;  
the sun shall not strike them,  
nor any scorching heat.*

*[17] For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd,  
and He will guide them to springs of living water,  
and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."*

Here are those coming out of the great tribulation. Here He is talking about the life of persecution directed against Christians from the ascension of Jesus to His second coming. Jesus says in John 16:33, [33] *I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.* That persecution which began after His ascension will continue like a woman's birth pangs, getting greater with intensity, until Jesus comes.

So there are two dynamics going on – the Kingdom of God, not yet in its glory but still here and spreading to the world as the Gospel of the Kingdom goes forward and the second dynamic is the tribulation, the evil empire striking back as it becomes more intense – until it all

comes to the consummation and the trumpet blows. So those who die in Christ are protected with the seal of God upon their heads and are brought into His presences for He loses not one. What will they be doing after coming out of the tribulation to Christ who has won the victory?

One, in the intermediate state where the souls are perfected and in the presence of the Lord, you will be worshipping the Lord with His people with undiluted affection and adoration. Secondly, you will serve Christ with no faltering and no need to confess sins. Thirdly, you will enjoy the unfettered presence of the Lamb, the Lord. In these days there are times we feel like the Lord is so far away but in those days that will never be felt. Fourthly, you will know the full satisfaction of seeing and being in the presence of Christ. That is not all you will enjoy but nothing else will be necessary for your joy. He will be your joy as you are in His presence. Number five, you will be directly shepherded by Christ. Right now, Christ is shepherding you through faulty people like me, elders and deacons. We praise the Lord for all of them but in that day the Chief Shepherd Himself will shepherd you. You will be perfectly fed and led by your Great Shepherd in that day. Sixthly, the presence of Christ will shelter you. He will wrap you up with His presence. Have you noticed in this pandemic what we struggle with, what we immediately want to do? We want to hug that person for we are made for touch. You will have His touch for all eternity as you are in His presence with His glorified body before you. Number seven, in all of the glorious blessings of this which is fetter for you are on a journey right now but then you will be home, and present with the Lord is much better, but the best is yet to come in the final state.

What will that final state be? We will look at the new heavens and the new earth in our next study. We'll also look at the benefits that believers will receive from Christ at the resurrection. At the resurrection believers will be openly acknowledged and acquitted from the day of judgment and perfectly blessed in the full enjoying of God unto all eternity and what will that be like? You will have a new body for the new heavens and the new earth and proclaimed as His from the judgment seat for all eternity but I'll share even more about this in the next study from what the Bible says about it. I know if Jesus doesn't come back yet you will die so is your soul right with the Lord? If He is your Savior and Lord then you're on your way home for that's where you are going – home to be with Him. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the time we could be together in Your Word. Thank You Father for the joy of just going to the Scriptures to see what we cannot speculate but know, because of what You have said and what You have revealed and Your Word is truth, unbreakable, infallible and inerrant. So thank You Christ for all of Your comforts in life and in death as we groan to shed a sin-cursed body in anticipation of the perfections of what You are preparing for us in glory for even as we groan we rejoice, for here we lift You up – there, You will lift us up into Your presence. Thank You Jesus, I pray in Your Name, Amen.

Power Point

What's Next?

*Q. 37 What benefits do believers receive from Christ at death?*

A. The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory; and their bodies, being still united in Christ, do rest in their graves, untill the resurrection.



*Q. 38. What benefits do believers receive from Christ at the resurrection?*

A. At the resurrection, believers, being raised up in glory, shall be openly acknowledged and acquitted in the day of judgement, and made perfectly blessed in the full enjoying of God to all eternity.