

Sun., Sept. 6: Labor Day Weekend, Holy Communion

Message Series: FAQs: Your Questions Answered with Biblical Facts

Message Series Theme Verse: Psalm 119:130

Memory Verse: Memory Verse:

“Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord. Yes, says the Spirit, they will rest from their labors for their deeds follow them.” Rev. 14:13

Message: “FAQs: What Is It Like after You Die?”

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 15:16-57, various

(Other Scripture Passages used: John 14:1-4, 1 Thess. 4:13-18, Rev. 7:4-17)

Text: Hebrews 12:1-3 “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith...so that you will not grow weary and lose heart

Blurb: What happens after we die? We know that someday Jesus will return, we will be given new bodies, and we will live eternally in heaven. But what about between now and then for those who have died? That’s the question for this, our last message in our FAQs series. If you want to know what it’s like for your deceased loved ones, or what life will be like for you during this “in between time,” don’t miss this message!

Out door worship.

Offering boxes available as people leave.

Parking spaces designated for drive in worshipers.

OPENING MUSIC: *Love Is a Mess* -Sanctify

WELCOME -Pastor David

Labor Day weekend!

Holy Communion is open communion - open to all.

MEMORY VERSE -Pastor David

“Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord. Yes, says the Spirit, they will rest from their labors for their deeds follow them.” Rev. 14:13

WORSHIP MUSIC SET -Sanctify

Cover the Earth

Hope Has a Name

Rejoice, the Lord is King!

Worship Prayer -Pastor Andrew

GENERATIONAL BRIDGE -Pastor Andrew

MESSAGE: FAQs: “What’s It Like After You Die?” -Pastor David

This is the last message in our Frequently Asked Questions series, Your Questions Answered with Biblical Facts. I’ve not gotten to all your questions, but some I’ve been addressing in the Monday devotionals.

Our last question is “What’s It Like After You Die?” It’s a fitting question for Labor Day, because Christian tombstones are inscribed, “Rest in Peace.” Those who die in Jesus get rest from *their labors*. Our memory verse, Revelation 14:13 says, “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord. Yes says the Spirit, they will rest from their labor and their deeds will follow them.”

I’ve saved this question for last, because, I’ll warn you, for some this may be confusing and tedious. But, if you hang in there, I’ll try to flush it out best I can, scripturally.

We know that those who die in Jesus don’t die. We die an earthly death—our bodies die—but who we are—our souls—don’t die. They go to be with Jesus. Jesus says in John 14 that we need not let our hearts be troubled when we believe in Jesus. He has gone to make an eternal home for us, and some day, will come and take us to be with Him. We can have peace and comfort, for we know we go to a better place, to glory.

Last week we learned that also some day Jesus will come back and create heaven back on earth, and that’s where we will live for eternity with Him. But what is life like for believers who die before Jesus comes back? What are they doing? Can they see us? Do they know what we’re doing...thinking? Do they ever come back to visit the earth?

Hollywood has gone nuts with all kinds of ideas about souls and living after death. There are already Halloween decorations out to buy, with ghosts, spirits, the walking dead! We have one of the world’s most famous ghost stories in MN, up in Duluth at the Glensheen Mansion. There have been multiple sightings of the ghosts of the heiress, Elizabeth Congdon, and her nurse, Velma Pietila, who were murdered there in 1977.

Do Christians believe that? No. There is no biblical evidence for such ghost stories. In my own mind, however, I could see a fairly good case for Satan playing tricks in order to get people thinking that ghosts existed, as a ploy to discredit the biblical claim for the afterlife.

So, what are the biblical facts? Let’s start with the end goal...how is God’s plan going to end?

The Bible only paints the bigger picture, and doesn’t offer the juicy details we are curious about. Some day Jesus will return, descending from the sky, leading all the hosts of heaven. 1 Thessalonians 4:17 says that those who have died in Christ will be raised from the dead in bodily form and will go to meet Him “in the sky.” Then, after the dead are raised, those who are still alive will be caught up with Christ in the air. The great party will all descend to earth, where Jesus will judge between the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:37, also Hebrews 9:28). The sheep are those who love Jesus, and they will be taken with Jesus into heaven. The goats are those who do not know Jesus, and they will be lumped in with the demons. Then there will be a great, final battle between Jesus and the angels against Satan and the fallen angels. In the end, Jesus will cast all the fallen angels into the great fire, and finally Satan himself, before sealing up the fiery pit and casting it away for ever. The old heavens and the old earth will be burned away, and God will bring down heaven to the earth (2 Peter 3:11-13). God will recreate earth, calling it the New Jerusalem, making heaven on earth (Revelation 20-21). The saints will live forever with resurrected and perfected, physical bodies, on a remade and perfected, physical earth, forever and ever.

So we get new bodies. That means we really care nothing about our old bodies when we die. We can bury them, burn them, or throw them overboard into the sea. Revelation 20:13 reports that when Christ comes back, “The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done.” We will be raised physically, but for those who die in Christ, our new bodies will be perfect in every way. Paul says in Philippians 3:21 that Christ will come back and “transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body.” After Jesus’ resurrection, He was given a new body, one that Thomas could touch, and a body with which the resurrected Jesus sat with the disciples and ate with them.

His body also kept the scars of His crucifixion. But Jesus' new body was also different and distinct. The disciples didn't recognize Jesus when they walked with Him on the road to Emmaus that first Easter. He somehow passed through walls to appear to the 11 locked up in the Upper Room.

Our new and glorious body is described in our Scripture passage from 1 Corinthians 15. Let me read parts from those verses, starting with verse 16. "But someone will ask, 'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?' Fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as He has chosen . . . What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. . . . When this perishable body puts on imperishability, and this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory.' 'Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?' But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

This heaven is described in the grandest of terms, because it cannot be accurately described using words and language. You will have to experience it to understand it. It cannot be explained. But, for comparison sake, the best things we have here are insignificant there. Precious gold here is like pavement in heaven. The New Jerusalem is far better than we can ever hope to imagine.

Jesus describes heaven as a mansion in John 14, where we all live with Him in God's house. Heaven means having immediate access to God, living with God "face to face." Jesus also talks about heaven being like a grand feast, where there is room for everyone, and He is the host. And heaven is life forever. John 3:16! This is even declared way back in Psalm 23, which proclaims that God's people "will dwell in the house of the Lord forever" (23:6b). (Also John 11:25 & 12:24-26).

We have those wonderful passages in Isaiah that describe how swords will be beaten into plowshares, there will be no more war (Isaiah 2:4), and how the wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf with the lion, and a little child shall lead them (Isaiah 11:6). Revelation 21:4 says that there will be no more death, no more sorrow, no more crying, no more pain. He will wipe away every tear. And there will be no more sin. Everything—and everyone—will be just the way God intends it.

Side note: in Matthew 22:30, Jesus says that after the resurrection there will be no more marriage, but instead we will all be like angels. I don't know what that might mean, but it could be that we will all be so close and intimate, so in love with everyone, that it will be like we share that marriage relationship with not just one person, but with everyone.

So, now, what about *before* then? What is it like for believers who die before when Jesus comes back and sets up heaven in completion? What is life like for dead Christians now?

Well, to begin with, we have to realize that this question is actually an earthly question. You see, it assumes a context of *time*. There is now, but time marches forward, and there will be the end times. But, the problem is that time is relative, particularly with God! God does not live in time. Time is part of the creation that God made. Before creation, there was no day or night or month or year. God lives outside time. That is why the Bible says, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8), and that with God, "a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day" (2 Peter 3:8, also Psalm 90:9:4).

So, when we die and go to be with God, perhaps we leave even the constraints of time. Perhaps dead believers are not sitting around in a waiting room somewhere waiting for the time when Jesus is to come back. Maybe after death, they go to be with Jesus, and to them, it is "in the twinkling of an eye" that Jesus then comes back. So, one idea that fits with the Bible is that the

moment we die on earth is for us the same moment of Jesus' earthly return, since between the two we go to be with Jesus outside of time. Can you get your head around that one?

Well, lets try another idea. Since I'm 50 I got the joy last month of a colonoscopy. Fun. I went in for the procedure, and the gave me something in my IV. I was alert one moment, talking to the nurses, and the next moment I was waking up, the procedure over. To me, only seconds had passed. But my watch said a half an hour passed! We do this every night, right? We are not aware of time passing when we sleep.

Jesus, and elsewhere in the Bible, doesn't talk about the dead being actually dead. Jesus says that Lazarus is sleeping, as well as the little girl He raises. When Stephan is stoned, the Bible reports that he "fell asleep" (Acts 7:60). Sleep is used to show that they are not eternally dead. Jesus says in Luke 20:38 that to God, all people are alive, even those who have died. The God of Abraham is a God of the living, even though on earth Abraham is dead.

This is where we get "rest in peace" from for death. Isaiah 57:2 says, "Those who walk uprightly enter into peace; they find rest as they lie in death" (also Job 3:17). Same with our memory verse from Revelation 14:13.

So, in death, our bodies stop living, but the actual person has simply shed his body. Their souls keep on living. Yet for the Bible, to be completely human means having a body. So that is why in the end, God will give us bodies again, perfect bodies. Jesus has a body after His resurrection.

After we die and before Christ returns, from an earthly perspective, we don't have bodies. We live spiritually only, but perhaps, biblically, we can think about it like our souls are sleeping.

So, biblical possibility #1: Time collapse. The moment of our death is the moment of Christ's return. Biblical possibility #2: Our soul falls asleep and wake up at the end times.

Biblical possibility #3: Our souls are awake with Jesus in glory until He returns. To the thief dying on the cross, Jesus promised, "Today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). Where that is, we don't know. We do know it will be with Jesus, and that it will be paradise. It will not be heaven, as completed after Christ returns. But it will be paradise because it will be with Jesus. Paul says that Christians "would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:8).

John had some visions of glory and wrote about them in Revelation. Now, in Revelation, the New Heaven and New Earth are described in chapter 21, with the coming of the New Jerusalem. But 14 chapters before that vision of the final coming of heaven, John gets a glimpse into the center of glory. In chapter 7, John sees the 144,000 sealed souls (7:4), and the great multitude from every nation and every tribe wearing white robes (9-14). This is after they had died, but before Christ returned. These are the elect, and those who will be in heaven eventually. But before that, John learns that:

1. They stand before the throne of God and serve Him night and day (7:15)
2. They will never be hungry or thirsty (7:16a)
3. They will not suffer the heat of the sun by day (7:16b)
4. The Lamb on the throne will be their Shepherd and will lead them to springs of living water (7:17a), and
5. God will wipe away every tear from their eye (7:17b)

In chapter 4, which might be making use of a poetic symbolism, we see the elders casting down their crowns before Jesus. So, another biblical possibility is that those who have died in Christ go to be with Jesus, they stay right by His throne until He comes back to earth. They have all their needs met, do not suffer, drink from living water and have God's immediate comfort.

My apologies to our Roman Catholic friends, but I see nothing in Scripture to indicate even the slightest chance of purgatory!

Now, a curious side note is that it seems that it is possible for dead people to come back to earth. Way back in the Old Testament, in 1 Samuel 28, there is this strange story of when King Saul pays a medium of Endor to call up the spirit of the dead prophet Samuel. And she does! Samuel, it says, comes up from the ground and demands of Saul, “Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up.” In answer to Saul’s quandary, Samuel then continues his prophetic role and foretells Saul that he and Jonathan would both die the following day. And, of course, they did. So this is a real seance, and Samuel was called back to earth by satanic power. But even here God allowed it only because He wanted Samuel to deliver the message delivered to Saul.

The other story of dead people appearing on earth comes in the New Testament when Jesus is transfigured. The story is in Luke 9. When Jesus temporarily basks in His divine glory, the disciples look up and see Moses and Elisha standing there, talking with Him. Now, Elisha never did die in the Bible—remember the chariots of fire?—but Moses certainly did.

In both of these stories, it doesn’t seem that the people had bodies, but were present in spirit form, as souls. Where they were residing, we don’t know, because this was before Jesus’ resurrection and ascension. But it does suggest some kind of peace and rest, because Samuel complains that Saul disturbed him.

The Old Testament talks a lot about Sheol, a vague, grey place where souls went after death. Revelation 20 says that when Christ comes back, Hades gives up its dead, wherever that is. And in Jesus’ parable of the binding of the strong man, Jesus hints that after He died and before He was raised, He went down to hell and unlocked those prison doors. But all these references to Sheol, Hades and hell seem very poetic and symbolic.

There are also another symbolic reference in the first verse of Hebrews 12. In the previous chapter, the author lists many of the Old Testament figures of faith. He says how they lived by faith and by faith saw the future glory God was bringing in. And then, beginning chapter 12, he says that all these saints who have gone on before, actually surround the Christian who is now trying to live faithfully. It says, “...we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses...” (12:1a).

So, what is life like after we die and before Jesus comes back? The Bible really doesn’t explain it. And what it does say, it seems to use mainly symbolism and imagery. We must not be able to understand it yet. But what we do know, is that the saints who have died in Christ are not dead. Their bodies have been given back to the earth, but their souls await new bodies. They have gone to be with Jesus, who is at God’s right hand. They are at rest, and they are at peace. They lack nothing, do not suffer, they drink from living water and have God’s immediate comfort. And there is the possibility that they are able to be with us in some way here in this life; somehow they gather around us as a great cloud of witnesses, encouraging us to live out our Christian lives faithfully.

We are going to celebrate Holy Communion. As we do, we proclaim that Jesus died and rose again to give life to all who die in Jesus. We proclaim that the dead in Christ are not dead but alive.

John Calvin argued that the sacrament joins worship here on earth to that in heaven. This is a good way to imagine all your dead loved ones participating in this worship today. We all come before Jesus, worship Him, and proclaim that His death and resurrection make us alive after death.

And as we do, I want you to hear the words again from Hebrews 12:1-3 “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith...so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”

Amen.

HOLY COMMUNION -Pastor David

Prayer of Confession
Words of Assurance
Great Thanksgiving
Words of Institution
Prayer for the Holy Spirit
Lord's Prayer
Receiving of the Elements
Communion Prayer

CLOSING SONG: *Blessed Assurance* -Sanctify**ANNOUNCEMENTS** -Pastor David

Next week's message: What is like after you die?
Next week: Outdoor worship! Bring lawn chair and hat.

OFFERING: -Pastor David

Please leave your offerings in the box as you leave.

MEMORY VERSE -Pastor David

"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord. Yes, says the Spirit, they will rest from their labors for their deeds follow them." Rev. 14:13

BENEDICTION -Pastor David

May the Holy Spirit fill you so that you "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him belongs glory now and forever. Amen." -2 Peter 3:18

CLOSING MUSIC -Sanctify