

A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH

PART IV



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Question #16 - *“Does the spirit leave the body at the time of death? Then Jesus comes at the end of time and takes the soul home to heaven.”*

In our last segment we continued our discussion about how humans are created in the Triune image of God, and the relationship our mind, body, and spirit have to each other. This took us into a conversation about the teaching of spiritual death and the fact that is not what happened when Adam and Eve fell into sin, nor was that what Jesus was talking about when He said we must be born again. In truth, Jesus was talking about the simple fact, it is our physical form which will experience death, and something must be done about this fact if we are going to obtain true eternal life as God created us to have. Jesus showed by His work on the cross, God can take care of this problem; and what all this tells us about what true salvation is, is what we are going to discuss in this segment of “A Matter Of Life And Death.”

Simply put, your parents giving you life according to the free will God gave to all people is what Jesus referred to as “...born of water...” and being born again by the will of God is what Jesus called being born “...of the Spirit,...” God showed us during creation that it was His will for humans to exist. God also gave humans a tree to eat from which would continually sustain their physical life, showing us it is His will we live forever.

The choices of man has made death part of our reality, but it's still the will of God that we live. This is the real greatness in what Jesus says in verse 6 of John chapter 3. “That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” Take that in the right context of meaning our physical form our parents gave us is what needs to be replaced with something not of this physical, temporal life, which is what God desires to do, and you go right into what Paul was saying in I Corinthians 15. Beginning in verse 51, he explains, “Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?”

This is what we are talking about when we talk about being “saved.” We can be saved from the judgment of death which we all must face! However, “saved” is another terminology problem most Christians have, and it's also, in no small part, due to the fact many believe it's our spirit which needs to be reborn and not clearly the flesh and only the flesh. Just as we like to say we are “born again,” we also like to say we are “saved!” Many Christians simply see these terms as the same thing, which in many ways they are because Jesus was telling Nicodemus how one could be “saved,” by explaining to him we must be “born again.” However, the simple truth of the matter is that we are not saved as yet, anymore than we are born again; because being born again, in like manner as Jesus was, is how we are “saved.”

The fact we are not as yet saved is seen in simple facts of this life, and many of these facts really trouble people who claim to serve The Lord. Because people believe they are saved, they don't understand why God allows, especially certain things, to affect them. The visible evidences we are not as yet saved are things such as: at the very time I am writing this, there is much sickness in my family and among my friends. There are also disasters in the world, both economical, environmental, etc. These things affect my life, my home, my ministry, and my everyday walk with God. People who believe they are saved often do not know what to make of these things, and for good cause. If everything in this

world of sin is still able to affect us, even after we are saved, then what good is it?

Now, I know some people would scold me for being sarcastic, but I'm not really being as sarcastic as one might think. The problem is, if we are saved at this moment, things for us should be different than they are for those in the world who are not saved. If we are born again, things should be different, and this truth is not denied by the church. For centuries people have struggled not just with the question of what happens to us after death, but as believers in Jesus, what is happening to us now? Believers wonder why they get sick and have hardship; they wonder why they do not even have some of the things in life held by people who are some of the most evil people they know. Different people have theology on this issue which says we are meant to suffer, and others go the other direction, saying we were meant to be prosperous, it's just that some of us don't know it or how to obtain it. Neither of these teachings are true!

God gives us grace to live for Him, but we are intended to live life just as all people are intended to live life. God grants us all a temporal life so we can make our choice. Temporal is necessary because God did not want people who were simply programmed to be what He wanted them to be. Instead, He wanted people who were free to be what they chose to be, but if some chose not to have anything to do with God, they would continually create a sin-filled world, as we plainly see. Those who still desire to know and be with God will be able to do so; but while in this sinful flesh, they will not be able to commune with the freedom man had before the fall. This is a fact death can correct. With the new form Jesus came to provide, we can be saved from death; and because the new form is incorruptible, there will no longer be pain, suffering, nor death any more for those who receive them. When those who desire God are born again in these new forms, this will be true salvation!

The real difference in this life is that we are suppose to live our lives like we believe what Jesus told Nicodemus is able to happen, in spite of the fact we have not yet experienced it! Being saved from this world and its sin, by being born again, should be something we expect to experience because we have a relationship with The One who holds the keys to death and the grave! We also want to see a place, not just where there is no more sickness and pain, but a place

which does not have the reason for that sickness and pain! We do not want a place where God is limited by man's free will to reject His direction, but a place where God is loosed to do His will because the only individuals in that place are those who desire God's will! God has the answer to all life's woes, and the fact we suffer here is because of sin. The fact we will die is because of sin! God's plan will save us from this state and the death that comes with it, by using death as a gateway for us to be eternally separate from sin. All we have to do is desire God and His righteousness over sin, and that is a desire we show by seeking after God! (Matt. 6:31-34)

This is what Paul is explaining in Romans. "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection:..." Romans 6:4-5 This is not the explanation of a person saved from sin, but instruction for one who is not as yet, who should be walking with the knowledge there is no reason to allow sin to be their master. Sin will ultimately take us to the grave, just as it takes all people to their grave - but who cares? God has already made a way for that fact to be nullified. Because this is true, even now we should live our lives as if we are already saved. This is what Paul lectures on in Colossians chapter 3; and while I would like for us all to stop right now and read that chapter, let me just quote verse 2 where Paul simply instructs, "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth." These facts are also exactly why Paul says, "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof." Romans 6:12

As long as we are walking in the flesh our parents are responsible for, we are vulnerable to the sin in this world. We are tempted to turn from God and do the lusts of the flesh. (James 1:12-15) If we want to be truly saved, we must turn from these lusts and remain turned from these lusts. (Rom. 6:16) We must show, no matter how many mistakes we make in the flesh, we are not desirous to make those mistakes. (Rom. 7:21-25) We should understand that when we suffer from things such as sickness, it does not ultimately matter; because all it is, is the deterioration of the body we must lose in order to receive the rebirth Jesus said was necessary to see the Kingdom of Heaven. (I Pet. 2:21-24)

Simply put, what a true believer desires is a relationship with God in order to learn how not to make the mistakes, and fall to the sin, which does so easily beset us. (Heb. 12:1-10) If we desire that, instead of the sin of this world, God is waiting, willing, and desirous to have a continual relationship with us. (II Cor. 6:17-18) We don't need what this world has to offer. Faith (which is a relationship with God) is the substance of what going to heaven is all about, and it is the evidence that God is not going to allow the death of our physical forms to separate us from Him. (Heb. 11:1) Why would He? If God is willing to have a relationship with us while we are yet sinners, (Rom. 5:7-10) why would He allow death, which gives us the ability to leave behind the sin of this life, to separate us from Him, when sin is not something we desire to keep on living in? (Eph. 2) This should become obviously true when we consider the fact God has proven, through The Messiah, He has the power to replace our corruptible flesh with a physical form which will never succumb to sin, and thus death, again!

With these facts in hand, the true believer does not fear death. Just like Nicodemus, we understand even people who live for God die. However, even if we do not perfectly understand the process, we know it's possible through Jesus Christ our Lord, not just to be saved from death but through death. In dealing with this question, what we are left with is one glaring fact which all Christians should know. Up until now, Jesus is the only One Who has ever been truly born again, and not just raised from the dead in these same physical forms which simply die again one day, such as was the case of individuals like Lazarus. Thus, our question comes down to time. If everything an individual is does not die like the body, and if we are not immediately resurrected into new bodies, where do those parts of us go?

Unfortunately, instead of turning to the fact God is greater than we are to answer this question, instead of looking at the fact God created everything we know including time itself, we tend to look only to what our eyes can see; and, many times, we listen to philosophies which those who only live for this physical world come up with. This being true, a very widespread theory, which attempts to explain what happens to the soul after death, tells us the soul does not leave the body at the time of death. That theory by its official name is "grave sleeping." Grave sleeping teaches just what the name indicates. It says, upon the death of the

body, the soul goes into the spiritual equivalent of dormancy, which physically we go into during life when we lay down to sleep. The theory says, the soul is still alive but simply unconscious. I find it very odd that so many Christians like this theory, considering the fact many Christians believe - just as we have discussed - that people are spiritually alive only once they receive Christ. If you believe this theory, do you believe we were made spiritually alive only to be put to sleep after the body fails? It doesn't make a lot of sense. However, many Christians like this theory, because they like or believe in the idea of the graves being physically opened as people are resurrected at the return of Christ.

In many people's minds this is what happened when Jesus rose. We even portray it, many times, when we act out the story of Jesus' work. It's that dramatic scene where the stone is rolled away and Jesus comes forth in glorious light from the tomb's opening. However, this is not really what happened, and is also something which may only have gotten started mostly because of what those in the performance business like to call "dramatic license." Dramatic license means you have the ability to tell the story with a little more flare in order to get the point across, invoke the emotion you want, and/or just make the story more interesting than it would be if you stayed right with the truth.

I'll admit, it is very emotional and truly shows the point that Jesus rose from the dead if we see Him actually leaving the tomb, especially in dramatic fashion! The problem is, it's simply not true! As we covered earlier, the tomb was not opened for Jesus to get out. Jesus proved such a thing was not necessary just after His resurrection. After His resurrection, Jesus did not need doors or windows to enter a room; (John 20:18-29) and lest we forget, we are already talking about a man who, even before His death, was capable of feats, such as walking on water! (Matt. 14:22-32) The truth that Jesus was already gone from the tomb is why the angel asked the women why they sought the living - which is what Jesus already was - among the dead? The angel did not ask this because he had just released Jesus from the tomb. That would be snide if the angel had only moments before that question opened the tomb for Jesus to get out. How could the women have known the angel had released Jesus just before they got there? The real point of the angel's question was to ask why they were coming to the tomb at all? Jesus was not there, just as He had explained to them he wouldn't be! (Matt. 17:22-23) The only reason the tomb was opened was



for us to see that fact we really would never have accepted any other way!

In the end, I don't think we can fully blame dramatic license for this misnomer. Grave sleeping also has a relationship to why we like to portray the story this way. Grave sleeping teaches one simple belief, and that is the idea the soul is in some way, even after death, still connected to the body. Before I go any further, let me say people believe a lot of variations on this issue; and I realize there are those who would argue my information is incorrect on the basis, some do not believe the soul is actually, or that it has to be directly, with the body, in the grave. This point is a technicality though. Some do not force the issue of the soul staying directly with the body, and in some cases this is because they see that the Bible does not appear to support this idea. Nonetheless, it all comes out the same, and brings us to the main point of this whole argument which is: grave sleeping has to do with the soul, even after the death of the body, having some attachment to the body, and thus the time it was meant to walk in.

Now, right off the top we need to understand, grave sleeping is not a Christian idea. This is important because when people believe something is a Christian idea, they, as Christians, often believe it must have some merit because someone who knew the Bible must have come up with it. The problem is, this is often not the case about many ideas within the church. In fact, just the opposite is more often true. What happened in the case of grave sleeping was, because no one knew the Bible for themselves, or because it was the desire of, at least, certain people to integrate teachings of non-Christians into the doctrine of Christianity for the sake of making the transition into Christianity easier or desirable, already existing cultural practices and ideas were adopted. When this happens, the original cultural idea is, many times, bent or covered with Biblical sounding ideas and/or names; but they really are just the practices a culture had before the religion of Christianity was important or forced upon them.

Grave sleeping exists in many false religions and cultural thoughts about death in some form or another. It will take on differing forms depending on what makes a certain culture or its leaders comfortable. However, they all boil down to that problem Christians wrongly accuse Nicodemus of, and that is, many people can't see past the physical. This is why some of the most well known cultural ideas about death, which

comes directly from the ancient world, are those held by the ancient Egyptians. Many of us are familiar with the Egyptian practice of mummification. There are a lot of gruesome details about how this is done, but the baseline reason behind the practice has to do with preserving the body for as long as possible. Thus, for mummification, the body is stripped of those things which facilitate deterioration, and wrapped up using procedures which preserve what is left for a very long time. Even those solid parts which are removed from the body are often placed in jars where they will be kept - or at least what is left of them can be kept - with the body.

All this is something modern men both marvel at, as well as scoff. People marvel at the fact the Egyptians put such great effort into figuring this out and doing it, especially for their greatly revered members of society. They also marvel at the fact ancient people had such great success at it. This is one of the reasons we put mummies in our museums! At the same time, people scoff at the fact ancient people went to such effort to do such a thing because of the religious beliefs which drove them. I for one think this is greatly hypocritical on the part of modern men; because while we love to call ourselves "scientific" instead of "superstitious," we use our modern knowledge to preserve bodies in much the same way. In societies such as in the U.S., something which the Bible simply tells us is made from dust and unto dust it will return, (Gen. 3:19) is carefully treated with chemicals, placed in a sealed coffin, and encased in a concrete vault as it is put into the ground. It really is quite ridiculous to go to all this effort in order to ensure natural forces can not affect a body before we put it into the ground, when that should be the whole point!

The point is, much like the Egyptians, we go to a lot of effort to ensure bodies are not simply allowed to go through a natural process of returning to the dust, and for many people this is because they do not want that process to happen. There are even Christians who believe cremation is wrong based on the idea it intentionally destroys the body. All this has to do with the fact people often have looked at death as a sleep of one sort or another. The monogram R.I.P. is synonymous with death, and it means, "Rest In Peace." The idea of sleeping has always been associated with death because it is what most physically describes what we see when we watch someone die, and because we do not understand death, we hold to that description.

People also like the idea of sleep because of a couple of facts we all know about sleep. First, we know we are not fully inactive during sleep. We dream, and many of the dreams people have feel very real, just like being awake. However, at times we are not even able to rightly describe what we dream because it makes no sense once we are awake, in spite of the fact it made perfect sense while we were in the dream. This is mainly due to the fact our dreams are not just the activity of the brain, such as an animal's dream. Humans are also experiencing activity of the mind and spirit, which causes many people to think about living, or even that they have, at times, lived in a different world, realm, or even that they have left their bodies altogether. The truth is, they have not. As long as the body is alive, we are here in this realm, and directly connected to our bodies.

The fact our spirit, and even our mind, can have a heightened sense and/or level of activity when our flesh is not constantly inputting is why inducing severe fatigue, and even the use of drugs, can cause "visions," and the like. These facts are why there are those who believe they have actually seen heaven, or traveled through time. Many do not realize or believe the mind and spirit both exist. They do not believe or understand the spirit is still active, even though, and in many ways especially because the flesh is inactive, or impaired. During these times, the mind is still doing what it does, and it's still receiving input from the spirit. While the spirit can give input equal to the flesh, it's not the same as what the physical would be inputting. For lack of a better way to put it, the spirit's input is also not coming from the same senses or channels as the flesh would receive its input, and people can be unfamiliar with it. Because we do not understand and/or believe this, many are baffled by the fact people in comas, and the like, can, in fact, wake with knowledge - or what seems like knowledge - they did not have before and should not have been able to attain while being physically inactive.

Even many people of the church do not understand things of the spirit; and thus, they do not understand practices such as fasting. Fasting is meant to free up time for something other than the flesh, but many people just don't see the value in suppressing the flesh. This is, in no small part, due to the fact they have never taken the time to listen to the spirit. However, fasting trains our flesh to be in submission to our mind, which is something we need to do, as we talked about earlier.

It can also serve the purpose of denying input from the flesh for a time so we may hear the spirit, both our own spirit as well as The Holy Ghost, which our spirit was intended to commune with.

This is exactly why we close our eyes, fold our hands, and bow our heads, when we pray. Blocking out input, which the flesh is continually willing and desirous to give, is beneficial to our mind's ability to clearly receive input from something else. This is not mysticism. It is a truth of our existence, and this fact is likely the reason God built us to have a standard sleep cycle to begin with. Remember, He could have created us any way He chose. The fact physical things have to rest, and most of that rest happens at the same time darkness comes, is only a truth because God created it to be so; and if God chose it to be so, there is a good reason for it!

Now, the second fact we all know about sleep, and one flesh-loving individuals love the most, is the simple fact we wake up! We go to sleep, but it's not eternal nor irreversible. If we look at death as a sleep instead of something quite different, we hold onto the hope death, like sleep, and like so many things we observe in the universe, is nothing more than a cycle, and will come back around to life. This is exactly why some cultures believe in reincarnation, and others want to preserve the body as long as possible. For the ancient Egyptian this idea was well defined, and that is why they did what they did without excuse. They believed as long as the body was intact to some degree, the person would live on in the "afterlife." It's likely most of us are familiar with that term, "afterlife," because of the Egyptians; but the very belief the body is somehow necessary for the "afterlife," means it's not really an afterlife as much as it is the struggle to maintain what is left in this life or return to it. Thus, all these stories and theologies are diametrically opposed to what the Bible teaches us!

In our next segment, we will talk more about what does, in fact, happen to us when we die. We will take a look at the differences between the resurrection - people such as Lazarus experienced, the resurrection of Christ, and the resurrection we need to truly be saved. This will take us into the heart of answering the question we are discussing in this series. Until then, I pray you will grow in His assurance and comfort as you prepare your life to meet The Lord at His return!