

What Is There To Look Forward To?

The CDC, the WHO and other health organizations publish yearly mortality statistics for various parts of the world. I know what they're trying to say but in the end mortality statistics are really very predictable.

An article in *The Onion*, which delights in publishing spurious news reports really hit the nail on the head. It read:

World Death Rate Holding Steady At 100 Percent

“GENEVA, SWITZERLAND—World Health Organization officials expressed disappointment Monday at the group's finding that, despite the enormous efforts of doctors, rescue workers and other medical professionals worldwide, the global death rate remains constant at 100 percent.

Death, a metabolic affliction causing total shutdown of all life functions, has long been considered humanity's number one health concern. Responsible for 100 percent of all recorded fatalities worldwide, the condition has no cure.”

That may be sarcastic but the reason sarcasm has such a sting is because it's always based on an underlying truth. In this case it's the truth that nobody escapes death.

We all die. So the next big question is, what's next?
What happens to us after we die?

That's an age old question that people have been wrestling with for millennia. It's a question that people all over the world, from every culture think about.

Why is that? If we were just chance products of impersonal evolutionary forces it wouldn't make any sense. But if we were creations of a personal, eternal God it would make perfect sense.

The Bible says that God made humanity in His own image. We bear the stamp of the divine. That stamp has been marred and twisted through sin, but even then it's still a reality.

So then what's in store for us after death? What is there to look forward to?

I. God Is The God Of The Living

Turn to Mark 12 Page 896

During the three and one half years that Jesus openly presented Himself to Israel as the promised Messiah, He taught and spoke repeatedly about spiritual truth.

Because of His obvious knowledge of the Scriptures, Jesus was always being asked hot button theological questions of the day.

There were two main sects in Judaism at the time of Christ and you'll read about both of them in the Bible.

The Pharisees were the religious conservatives and the Sadducees were more the liberals. According to Acts 23:8 *Sadducees say that there is no resurrection--and no angel or spirit; but the Pharisees confess both.*

In Mark 12 the Sadducees, who didn't believe in a resurrection came to Jesus with this gem. **Read verses 18-23**

You can just see the Sadducees prodding the Pharisees with this logic question. They thought it disproved a resurrection.

Notice Jesus answer: **Read verses 24-27**

First Jesus says, the answer to this is in the Bible. The Bible is the source manual for all spiritual truth.

Second He says, there is a resurrection. Sadducees your wrong on that one.

Third Jesus explains, there is no marriage in the life to come. If you've never been to Salt Lake City and the main LDS temple, it's a real experience. What you see all day long is brides and grooms in full wedding outfits entering and leaving. They are everywhere. Obviously, that's not a sight you see every day so it's an eyecatcher.

There are thousands of weddings that take place there because the LDS church teaches that marriages between worthy Mormons that are sealed in the temple are eternal marriages.

I was there on a tour once and someone asked about the brides and grooms, The tour guide very graciously explained about the doctrine of marriage for eternity. At that point I just had to ask, so said, "Why did Jesus say that in the resurrection people neither marry nor are given in marriage?"

And this was her answer: She said, "There will be no weddings in eternity, but if your already married you remain married for eternity."

Obviously that's not at all what Jesus was saying here. The question was, "...in the resurrection, whose wife will she be?" and the answer was "nobodies."

She's nobodies wife because eternity is totally different from this present age in which we now live.

Fourth, Jesus refers back to Exodus 3 where Moses is commissioned by God to rescue Israel from Egyptian slavery. There God makes this statement. *I am the God of your father--the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.* Exodus 3:6

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were long since dead. But God doesn't say "I was their God." He says, "I am their God."

Jesus conclusion? God is the God of the living. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob might have died physically, but they were still alive.

God is the Lord of the living. In the New Testament Jesus is called the Prince of life. There clearly is life after death.

I. God Is The God Of The Living

II. Death Ushers A Child Of God Into The Presence Of God

The world religions recognize life after death. That's something that's in our hearts because of the fact that the Lord of Life is our Creator. But without God's revelation, religion just becomes peoples' various ideas.

For instance, Buddhism says after death, one is reborn in successive incarnations until he/she awakens (as the Buddha did) and becomes liberated from the cycle of life and death. That enlightenment is called reaching nirvana. Nirvana's not exactly a "state"--it's an awakening to truth. In this awakesness one is free from suffering, attachments, and delusions.

Hinduism takes another approach. The ultimate goal for Hindus is Moksha, self-realization and release from the cycle of death and rebirth. It usually takes many lifetimes to achieve Moksha, during which a person is reborn in more or less desirable forms depending on his or her behavior in the previous lifetime. When Moksha is achieved, the soul will become one with God.

In Islam there are various levels of heaven. If you're a good Muslim and your good works outweigh your bad you might get there. No guarantees. There's a lot of debate among the various interpretations of Islam but those on the strict Wahhabi side teach that there's a guarantee of paradise.

Just be a male and die in Jihad and you get to bypass the judgment and go straight to your reward which includes 70 brown eyed virgins and non stop sex. The man who dies in jihad is eternally young and endowed with super human sexual prowess.

There's Islamic scholars who want to sugar coat things and say that's not true. Well, remember Mohammed Atta? He led the 911 hijackers. Due to a mix up at the airport his luggage was sent on another plane. We recovered his suitcase and packed neatly in it was his special wedding suit. He was headed for his harem in the sky.

Various religions believe in various views of the after life. The Bible presents something much different.

It says this, *So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.* II Corinthians 5:6 & 8

We are not our bodies. A friend told me about a very unique funeral he went to for a very godly believer. They guy planned his own funeral service. The casket was a plain pine box, the service was very upbeat and triumphant, and there was a sign on the casket, "The shell is here but the real nut is gone."

We're living in our bodies. The Bible says right now we're at home in our bodies. But we're more than our bodies. Our bodies are very important. That's why there'll be a resurrection of the body. But we are much more than just our body.

The Bible says, *Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.* I Thessalonians 5:23

Our body is the house we live in. The spirit is that part of us that communicates with God. The soul is the seat of our emotions. Sometimes the word “soul” is used in the Bible to refer to both the spirit and soul together. In other words the immaterial part.

When Adam sinned in the garden he died. God had warned, *but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.*” Genesis 2:17

Adam ate but he didn't drop over physically dead. He began to die physically but God had promised that he'd die the very day he ate.

What happened was, Adam died spiritually. Suddenly he was cut off from God. Suddenly he was afraid of God. He hid from God.

Turn to John chapter 3 Page 940

A Pharisee named Nicodemus has apparently seen and heard Jesus and he's got some questions.

Read verses 1-3

While many of the Pharisees and Sadducees were upset by Jesus, some, like Nicodemus were very interested. Nicodemus was a member of the Sanhedrin, which was like a spiritual and political Supreme Court. He was a very influential man.

Notice, Jesus tells him, it doesn't matter who you are, famous or not, if you want to see heaven you must be born again. To which Nicodemus replies, **Read verse 4**

Like a lot of people today, the term “born again” confused the learned Jewish leader.

Read verse 5-7

The born of water isn't baptism. Christian baptism was started after Jesus death. Jesus is answering Nicodemus' question.

Every body's born once. That's born of the flesh, or born of water. But flesh can't produce a spiritual birth so we all need a second birth. We need a spiritual birth that can only come from God.

We're spiritually dead as descendants of Adam and we need a new birth. How does that happen?

Read verse 16

When we come to the place in our spiritual lives where we realize that we've sinned against a holy God and place our faith in Jesus Christ as Savior we're forgiven. We're born again. We pass from spiritual death to spiritual life. That makes us children of God. It also makes us fit for heaven. An apostle named Paul was used by God to start churches all over the Mediterranean world and to write several New Testament books.

Philippians was written by Paul from a Roman prison cell. He wasn't sure he'd get out alive but here was his life's philosophy.

I trust that my life will bring honor to Christ, whether I live or die. For to me, living means living for Christ, and dying is even better. But if I live, I can do more fruitful work for Christ. So I really don't know which is better. I'm torn between two desires: I long to go and be with Christ, which would be far better for me. But for your sakes, it is better that I continue to live.
(Philippians 1:20-24 New Living Translation)

He says, "If I live, I can keep serving God. That's good. If the Romans kill me I go to be with Christ. That's great. I can't lose either way!"

The Bible is clear. If we die as those who are born again by faith in Christ, we go to be with Christ. Death ushers a child of God into the presence of God.

I. God Is The God Of The Living

II. Death Ushers A Child Of God Into The Presence Of God

III. Heaven Is Heaven Because Jesus Is There

You'll often hear people say things like "I don't believe heaven is a place. Heaven and hell are just states of mind."

Listen to the Bible.

This is 40 days after Jesus' bodily resurrection. *Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He (Jesus) was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven."* (Acts 1:9-11)

Jesus was raised bodily. The tomb was empty that first Easter morning. Jesus ascended back to heaven bodily. Jesus is coming back one day in the clouds bodily.

Heaven is a location because Jesus ascended there in His glorified, resurrected body. In John 14 Jesus told His disciples, *In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.* (John 14:2,3)

Heaven is a place and what makes heaven heaven is that Jesus Christ our great God and Savior is there.

turn to the last book in the Bible, the book of Revelation. Page 1090

There's 52 references to thrones in the New Testament. Thirty-six of those are in the prophetic book of the Revelation. Over and over again we're shown scenes that take place around the throne of Christ. Lets look at some

Read 4:2,4, 10-11

As with much of the symbolism in the book of Revelation there's a difference of opinion as to who these 24 elders are. Since they wear white robes and have *stephanos* which are victors crowns as opposed to *diadema* which are kingly crowns, I think they represent believers.

Who ever they are, notice what they're doing. They're worshiping Jesus.

Look over at chapter 5. Read verses 8-13

Chapter 11 Verse 16

You get the idea. No one is saying, "Let's go to the movies, I'm bored." No one's talking about football or playing their Wii. Everyone is focused on the Lamb who sits on the throne.

Everyone is completely satisfied to spend their days in worship and singing to Jesus. That's what makes heaven heavenly. Jesus is there. We are free from our sin nature that plagues us here on earth and our worship is totally pure.

I love to sing praises to God. I'm really enjoying the change we made in our services. I get to meditate on and express God's word through preaching but then my worship can flow out of those meditations.

By the way, we're working our way through the changes and tweaking things in our services to make them flow as smoothly as possible.

But I've had a few people who seemed to be confused as to why we're singing for such a long time. We're not.

We always shoot for the goal of 1 hour and 15 minute services. That's always the way we've done things. Since we can't time things exactly, we figure in a 10 minute window so that the service goes anywhere from an hour and 10 to an hour and 20 minutes.

That's not changed. That's exactly what we're still doing. The only thing that changed is where we place the sermon in the service. We're not singing more songs, we're just singing them after the message instead of before.

I love to sing. I also know that I have to tone it down some because I'm so musically challenged that I'm always off key. I throw everybody off around me.

When we're in heaven we won't have to worry about that. Our expression of worship will be beautiful sounding.

Not only that, but did you ever have those times where you thought, "I can't honestly song the words to a song. I'd be lying if I sang those words because they're not always true in my life."

In heaven, they'll always be true. The distraction and temptation of sin and self will be history. Our praise will be pure. We will finally fulfill the scriptures that tells us to worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.

One more thing. No one will say, "I wish we'd sing the kind of songs I like once and a while." We'll like them all! Heaven won't be about us. Heaven will be about the glorious, preeminent, renowned, unequalled, King of Kings.

I. God Is The God Of The Living

II. Death Ushers A Child Of God Into The Presence Of God

III. Heaven Is Heaven Because Jesus Is There

IV. We Will Be Ourselves In Eternity

There's no end to the misconceptions people have about what we'll be like in eternity. The most bizarre pseudo-Christian belief is the we'll become angels.

That's not going to happen. Angels are created beings who were not made in the image of God. We are created in God's image.

So will it still be us after we die?

Turn to Luke 16 Page 926

Before the cross all the dead went to *sheol*, which is a Hebrew term. In the New Testament *sheol* is known by the Greek word *hades*. Sheol or hades had 2 compartments. There was the side called hell and the side identified as paradise, or Abraham's bosom.

After the cross Jesus opened up heaven and now paradise is in the presence of God or what we would commonly call heaven.

Notice what's going on in this pre-cross scenario Jesus describes.

Read verses 19-31

Some want to say that this was just a parable and not an actual event. If so, this would be the only parable Jesus ever told that included somebody's name.

This is a real event. And notice the individuals are conscious, have memories, and feelings. They don't have a body at this point. That doesn't come until the resurrection. But they're still unique individuals who are still themselves.

I know we're focusing on heaven right now and not hell but I find it astonishing that even though their statuses have been reversed, the rich man (who obviously was not a believer) seems to be blind to what has happened.

He still expects Lazarus to be his servant and treats him as his water boy. He doesn't ask to get out of hell but implies that God was at fault for not giving his family enough information about the afterlife.

Talk about denial, blame shifting, and spiritual blindness. Tim Keller writes, "Hell is simply one's freely chosen identity apart from God on a trajectory into infinity. No one ever asks to leave hell. The very idea of heaven seems to them a sham. The people in hell are miserable. All their humility is gone, and thus so is their sanity. They are utterly, finally locked in a prison of their own self-centeredness."

The very opposite of that is heaven. Our fulfillment is not self, it's Jesus Christ. But notice in the account Lazarus was still Lazarus and the rich man was still the rich man.

In eternity I'll always be Ed Regensburg with out the negatives. If you have trusted Jesus Christ in eternity you'll always be you with out the negatives. Forever.

The biblical timetable goes like this. Christ died and rose again and all believers who die now go to be with Him in heaven. At the end of this age there will be a catching away of living believers we call the rapture.

At the rapture the living will get their new bodies and the dead in Christ will have their bodies resurrected.

Approximately 7 years later Jesus will return to earth and destroy His enemies at the battle of Armageddon. Following that will be a thousand year kingdom time when Jesus will rule from David's throne in Jerusalem.

Faithful believers will rule with Him.

Then at the end of that thousand years will be what we refer to as "eternity."

The Bible says, Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God.

"And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful." (Revelation 20:1-5)

In heaven, and on into eternity, we'll have emotions, feelings, and desires. All of those things are part of what makes us, us. They just won't be corrupted and tainted by sin.

And because we retain our identities, we'll know one another. In the account of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16 they recognized each other and Abraham. At the time of the transformation in Matthew 17 Peter recognized Moses and Elijah. Jesus was recognized by His disciples after His resurrection.

We will be reunited with friends and loved ones who have gone on before us. We'll be able to talk to the disciples and the believers who have lived down through the ages. We'll even get to meet people who came to Christ through missionaries we supported with our prayers and finances. And we'll have all eternity to do it.

Remember, despite all of our advances in medicine and technology the death rate is still 100%. That means that you and I need to be ready to face eternity.

According to the Bible, Jesus is the only way.

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:14-15)

Jesus said, *And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. (John 10:28)*

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23)

And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. (I John 5:11)

Are you ready to face eternity? This is the most important question you'll ever answer. Everything else is inconsequential in comparison. Are you ready to meet God? Have you come His way, through Jesus Christ?