

Greatest Questions



If A Man Dies, Will He Live Again?

Steve Flatt

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"If a man dies, will he live again?" (Job 14:14) is a question that has haunted the mind of every man and woman who has ever lived. From the dawn of creation, it has been an enigma to the mind of man. Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes something like his journal. He was perplexed; he had more questions than answers. "All go to the same place, all come from dust and to dust all return. Who knows if the spirit of man rises upward?" (Ecclesiastes 3:20) Though Job offered no answer to his question and though Solomon went through a period where he had more questions than answers, the Scripture gives an emphatically clear answer to the question if a man dies, will he live again? YES! YES! A hundred times YES!

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth on him would not perish, but have" (What?) "Everlasting life." (John 3:16) Jesus told Martha, the sister of Lazarus who had just died, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die." (John 11:25) He said to his disciples, I am about to leave you but "In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am." (John 14:2-3)

1 Corinthians 15 and 1 Thessalonians 4 are great chapters about the return of Jesus. Finally, the aged Apostle John is given the opportunity in a vision to see heaven itself. He gives it a magnificent description; I guess the best you can do in human language. My favorite part is his description of Jesus' Church as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. (Revelation 20:1-7) If a man dies, will he live again? Oh, yes he will.

But we know much of our world doesn't believe that, not even much of the religious world believes it. A Gallup poll that looked at our religious beliefs as a country indicated that 94 percent of all Americans believe in God. That's encouraging, isn't it? I was surprised that 84 percent of America believes that Jesus is the Son of God, not just a great man. But less than 70 percent of America believe that there will be a heaven and significantly less than half believe that there is a literal hell.

Our religious culture has no room today for eternity. We have stripped faith of its eternal dimensions. Heaven has become just learning how to live the good life. Hell has just become the self-induced trauma that we have when we don't. We, who don't believe that sometimes, maybe even oft-times, act like we believe it. We become so absorbed with the propaganda of our culture, so absorbed in the quest for things and status, and so caught up with what I call the "Gospel of NOW," we tend to lose sight of eternity, don't we?

Have any of you ever seen the movie *Heaven Can Wait*? The plot of the movie was about a professional football quarterback who was called home to heaven early in an accident. When he gets there in heaven, the angel talks to him and says, "Oh no, we've made a mistake." The whole plot of the movie is about how can we get him back down on earth so he can play in the Super Bowl. I mean after all, who would want to go to heaven when you can play in the Super Bowl? Do you see how insidious it is? We Christians watching the movie were sitting there going, "Yes, Yes, get him back, get him back, get him back."

I think if the truth be told, we're a lot like little Tommy in the Sunday School class. The teacher asked "How many of you want to go to heaven?" Everybody raised their hand except little Tommy. The teacher looked at Tommy and said, "Tommy, don't you want to go to heaven one day?" He said, "Oh, one day. I thought you meant right now."

Oh yes, I want to go to heaven ONE day, like that one day I'm going on that African safari, one day I'll try sky diving, one day I'll really climb up and clean out the attic and that one day that down in our hearts we think will never really come.

We've lost sight of eternity. We've lost the depth of the meaning of Hebrews 9:27, "It is appointed unto man once to die and after that the judgment." We've lost the meaning of Acts 17:31, "Because he has fixed the day upon which he will judge the world with righteousness by a man whom he has appointed and of this he has given assurance by raising him from the dead." The resurrection of the dead means a lot of things, but here's one thing it means: The God who is able to raise Jesus up from the dead is able to judge the entire world based upon what they do with Jesus, The Christ.

When I was a boy growing up, I heard a lot of sermons about eternity, heaven and hell. It seemed like I heard more on hell. Maybe I just remembered those longer. I thought, if I ever get a chance to preach, I don't think I'm going to preach like that, I think I'm going to preach like Jesus preached. Then I grew up and I read the Bible. I found out that nobody preached more about heaven and hell than the man, Jesus of Nazareth.

If you don't believe it, read his statements in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Nobody was calling his listeners more often to weigh temporal gain against eternal consequences than Jesus of Nazareth. Re-read the parables and the Sermon on the Mount. "What would it profit a man if he were to gain the whole world, but lose his own soul?" "What will a man give in exchange for his soul?" Jesus didn't come preaching about how to change the government and he lived in a corrupt one. He didn't come preaching about how to be healthy and wealthy. He didn't come to try and tell men how to talk in tongues. He came to teach about eternity and he did it with force. This might surprise you, but nobody taught more about hell than Jesus, the Christ.

Who was it that said, "Why do you fear the one who can destroy the body when you ought to fear the one who can destroy both the body and soul in hell?" See the former is "NOW" thinking; the other is "ETERNITY" thinking. We do a grave injustice to ourselves and to this world if we don't answer Job's question: "If a man dies, will he live again?" The answer is: Yes, he will. But where? See the question isn't whether eternity or not, the question is what kind of eternity, Heaven or Hell.

There is one key passage about life after our time here on earth. "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.' But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor

can anyone cross over from there to us.' He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.' "No, father Abraham," he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'" (Luke 16:19-31)

Five elementary truths about eternity can be found in the above text.

1. Death will not end your existence.

If a man dies, will he live again? You can be sure of it. You know death is the earth's great equalizer. I don't care who you are or what you have, you won't escape it. When we hear of a poor person dying, somebody who lives in the slums, some beggar or homeless person, it doesn't seem to register. But when we hear that a rich person died overnight of a heart attack, we are aghast. That is because we tend to associate people with what they have. Since a rich person has a lot it's going to last for a long time. Let me tell you something, you're not going to die a rich man. You're not going to die a poor man. You're just going to die a man. What you have won't make one shred of difference. You leave all your earthly wealth, fame, honor and position behind at death. Death is Earth's great equalizer.

Death doesn't end your existence. When you die you will have consciousness. If I read this correctly, Abraham, the rich man, and Lazarus, they knew who they were and they knew where they were. You will have an identity. The rich man was the rich man, Lazarus was Lazarus, Abraham was Abraham and Isaac was Isaac. In fact you will still be you. Apparently, there will be some degree of memory. Did you notice how Abraham said to the rich man, "Remember when you lived, you had your fine things." Death doesn't end your existence.

The Sadducees were a sect of Jews who did not believe in the resurrection. They were always trying to trip Jesus up. So they asked him "Lord, teacher, tell us this. If a man had a wife and he dies, and then she marries his brother, then he dies, and then she marries another brother. Well, let's just say that goes on 10 times, then in the resurrection, whose wife will she be?" When they finished the question, Jesus looked at them and said, "You've got two problems. You don't really believe in the power of God and you don't even know the Scripture." He said, "Haven't you read how the Almighty said, 'I AM the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.'" And he said that long after they died. He didn't say I WAS the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. "I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I'm not the God of the dead, I'm the God of the living." Death does not end your existence.

2. There will be an immediate separation.

There will be an immediate separation. I gather that not only from the rich man and Lazarus but also from Matthew 25 where Jesus talks about separating the sheep and the goats into two separate groups, those who will come in and receive the blessings and those who will be outcast. Now I know some people can't believe that our loving Almighty God would send people to hell.

I've searched my Bible through and through. I find no place in Scripture where the Bible says God sends anybody to hell. I find the exact opposite. "God is patient, not wanting anybody to perish." (2

Peter 3:9) The only reason this old world is still standing today is because God knows that somebody is going to come to Jesus today, and he wants them as part of the kingdom. God says, "...I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked..." (Ezekiel 33:11) I confess that is one way I'm far short of God. There are times when I read of somebody getting on an airplane as a terrorist with guns and bomb traps and maybe they kill a couple of hostages and are holding the rest. Every now and then a SWAT team will come and they'll shoot them, just shoot them right there. There is a part of me when I hear that, I say, "YES. Good. Get the rest of them." Because I fear they won't come to justice, otherwise. But not God, my God has no joy in the death of a wicked person. Do you know why? Because when that wicked person dies, he or she is lost. God doesn't send anyone to hell. When someone rejects Jesus Christ and Heaven, they condemn themselves and choose Hell.

"For God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes on him will not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16) The next verse says, "For he didn't come to condemn the world, but he came to save the world through himself." Folks, get this idea out of your mind. It is not that at your death God will choose to send you to some realm of death, you have chosen the death lifestyle for yourself right now. All God is going to do on that great judgment day is to declare the choices that men and women have been making for themselves all along. That's the reality. If you think God wants to send anybody to hell, re-look at the cross. If there is ever proof that our God will go out of his way to make sure anybody and hopefully everybody will be saved, it's at the cross of Jesus Christ. But for those who are not washed by the blood that's offered there, they will be on the wrong end of an immediate separation.

3. Every man's eternal destiny is unchangeable.

If heaven and hell, if paradise and torment have anything in common, it is their unalterable fixedness, mercy comes before the grave. I've searched my Bible and found absolutely no validity that you could pay or pray themselves or anyone else into heaven after death. In fact in the story about the rich man and Lazarus, Abraham looked at that rich man and in a Greek tense says, "There has been and remains yet fixed a gulf between us that no man can span." In a sense God didn't dig that chasm the rich man did. He did it during his life. He lived his life separate from people like Lazarus, didn't he? His whole life, he said, "Lazarus, I'm over here and you're over there, don't you bother me and I won't bother you. I don't want to have anything to do with a poor old wretch like you." Really all God did when the rich man died is to keep what he had chosen intact.

I've already alluded to in some sense and in many ways the future life is just the present life identified continued. What's interesting to me is that even in torment, even in hell, the rich man still saw Lazarus as a beggar and servant. He looked over at Abraham and said, "Abraham, tell Lazarus to go down there, get me some water and bring that water back here." He still saw him as a servant. Every man's eternal destiny is unchangeable after death.

4. The righteous will receive comfort.

I suspect it is more than coincidental that we don't know the name of the rich man, but we know the name of Lazarus even before he died. That kind of indicates to me that God knew all along who the important one was, didn't he? Now I suspect that when the rich man died he had one elaborate funeral. There were flowers everywhere and memorials given to charities in his name, they probably

lined the synagogue; the mayor was there and maybe even the procurator of Jerusalem. I imagine everybody was there for his funeral. But all it says about Lazarus is he died. It doesn't even say he is buried. I suspect they threw him out in old Potter's field. But I know for a fact Lazarus had one thing at his funeral that the rich man didn't have. He had angels. Angels carried him to Abraham's bosom. Suddenly, he is the affluent one. Death was the best thing that ever happened to Lazarus.

I've said this many times at funerals, but I want you to hear it while you're alive, okay? I'm convinced that when you are baptized into Christ, you have already experienced the only death of any significance you ever need to experience. "Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? (Romans 6:3) That's the saving power of this universe. Galatians 3 states that when we are baptized into Christ, we are clothed in him. 1 Thessalonians 4:14 says, for since "We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him." Did you notice those two little words, "IN HIM?" The question is not: Are you going to fall asleep? Are you going to die? If the Lord tarries long enough, everybody is going to die. The question is: Are you going to fall asleep IN HIM? When we die with Christ in immersion (baptism) and are raised to walk in a newness of life, we become IN, HIM, CHRIST. We've died the only death of any significance. We have the promise of Scripture that when we sleep, we will be raised to experience comfort and peace.

5. The unrighteous will experience agony.

In torment, it was the rich man who became the beggar to the point that even one drop of cold water was worth begging for. I'm not attempting to graphically or physically describe hell. I know that from what we've just read, the rich man was in pain. He had the pain of remembering an opportunity that he had ignored. He had the pain of knowing the fate of others who were destined to his same fate, his brothers.

I can't with a finite mind describe exactly what hell will be like. But there were three things that Jesus constantly associates with hell throughout his teachings. He talks about fire, weeping, and gnashing of teeth.

How utterly presumptuous is that any one of us to act like that wouldn't matter or that it doesn't exist.

All of us need to ask some serious questions about who we are and where we're going.

Consider the future. Get away from the "Gospel of NOW" and think in light of eternity. The devil's oldest tool is to get man to think about right now. Remember when Esau came in after a three-day hunt and Jacob was cooking up some stew, he said, "Let me have some stew, Jacob." Jacob said, "Okay, but I want your birthright." Do you think Esau thought that through? He wasn't thinking about forever. He thought, I'm hungry and I want it right now. What was David thinking when he stood on his roof and looked down and saw Bathsheba? Do you think he was thinking about the long term? Do you think he thought about any consequences, especially any eternal consequences? All he thought about was I want that woman and I want her right now. All Judas was thinking about when he betrayed the Son of God was not the fact that there would never be another family to name a male child, Judas, again. He was thinking about 30 pieces of silver would spend real good right now.

Paul has one of the greatest and most simple statements I've ever heard, "So we look not to the things which are seen, but the things which are unseen. For the things which are seen are temporary. And the things which are not seen are eternal." (2 Corinthians 4:18) If you could come back 100 years from today and stand in the very spot where you are standing, I doubt that you would see anything you can see right now. If you can see it, it's temporary. If you can't see it, it's eternal. Those invisible things are things like God's love. That's why nothing can separate us from God's love. (Romans 8:35) Or like the church, nobody can lay their eyes on the whole church, except God. The gates of Hades, the grave, will not prevail against the church. Your soul is invisible, too. We see the body is going to return to the dust from whence it came, but not the soul that animates, and gives life to every one of our bodies. The real you is going to live forever somewhere. Think in light of the future.

Walk in light of Scripture. The rich man made two mistakes, he was selfish, as most of us tend to be, and he minimized the power of the written Word of God. If he hadn't done that, the Word of God would have changed him. Do you remember when he said, "Look, if you can't help me, send somebody to my brothers?" Abraham replied, "Let them listen to Moses and the prophets." He said, "Oh, they won't listen to Moses and the prophets, but if someone came back from the dead, they'd listen." It closes with some of the most chilling words I've ever heard, "If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not listen to someone who has come back from the dead."

Jesus has "come back from the dead." How are you responding to the Word of God and to the Jesus it presents? Is your heart or mind opened or closed? Have you obeyed His gospel? Do you have your eyes set on eternity? If you've been living in the "Gospel of NOW," it's only temporary, focus on eternity. Today is the day of salvation. Change from the ways of the world by putting your faith and trust in Him now. Call upon Him to forgive, confess your belief that He is God who came to earth in the flesh, die to your sins, and be buried. Be buried in water baptism so He can raise you to a new life of righteousness and be added to His church. Amazing Grace #1278 Steve Flatt September 1, 1996

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