

The Christian Life Lesson 9 2Q 2009

Heaven

SABBATH

Read Memory texts – thoughts? What does this passage mean to you? Do you have any questions about this passage?

Read both paragraphs – thoughts? Is heaven real? What is heaven?

SUNDAY

Read first paragraph “It is quite...” thoughts?

What evidence is there for mortality of mankind? The lesson cites several verses –

- Look on me and answer, O LORD my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death; Psalms 13:3
 - How do we respond to the idea that this is a poem and the psalmist is speaking in euphemism and necessarily to be taken literally?
 - We bring in other Bible passages and evidences
- For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing; they have no further reward, and even the memory of them is forgotten. Their love, their hate and their jealousy have long since vanished; never again will they have a part in anything that happens under the sun. Ecc 9:5,6
 - How do we respond to those who say Ecclesiastes are the writings of a man who was depressed, discouraged and exploring how futile life is, and is not to be taken literally. For instance, do we take literally that even the memory of the dead is forgotten? Do we believe that never again will they have part in anything that happens under the sun

or do we believe there is a resurrection? Is this the best text to support the idea of mortality?

- How do we respond to those who claim near death experiences as evidence there is consciousness after death?
 - Reports of NDE experiences go back almost 2000 years and are reported by approximately 20% of people who suffer a heart attack and are revived.

Interestingly, however, a person does not have to be near death to experience a NDE. A 1990 study at the University of Virginia Health Sciences Center in Charlottesville of 58 people who had experienced NDEs found that half would have survived without medical care. Something as innocuous as fainting can produce an NDE.

There are many theories about the cause of NDEs to include hypoxia (lack of oxygen to the brain), which could trigger seizures in the temporal lobes and cause the symptoms of NDE, hypotension (loss of blood pressure to the brain), endorphin and enkephalin (brain produced mood elevators and pain killers) release, drugs injected during resuscitation, low blood sugar and other metabolic processes.

Recently, Kevin Nelson a neuropsychologist at the University of Kentucky has done research into NDEs and offered a most reasonable explanation. NDEs are actually a form of sleep disorder called REM intrusion in which dreams occur in a non-sleep state. During this time a person is awake but paralyzed, may experience the sensation of floating, will have vivid dreams that would be experienced more like a hallucination and have out of body experiences. All of this will be remembered

quite vividly after the event is over with a sense of conviction to the veracity of the experience.

A study published in 1994 by Thomas Lempert, then at the Rudolph Virchow Clinic in Berlin, Germany, documented how volunteers made themselves faint through a combination of hyperventilating, standing and breath-holding. Many of them experienced euphoric NDE-like sensations such as floating out of their body, entering another world, or encountering supernatural beings. This is thought to be due to activating the vagus nerve which stimulates the brainstem to cause these NDEs. This would explain the high occurrence of NDE in people being resuscitated from a heart attack as vagal nerve stimulation occurs during this process.

What texts give more insight into the nature of man?

- I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹ Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— ⁵² in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. ⁵³ For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. ⁵⁴ When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.” 1Cor 15:50-54

If the mortal must put on immortality would that mean that we are not currently mortal?

- While Jesus was still speaking, someone came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue ruler. “Your daughter is

dead,” he said. “Don’t bother the teacher any more.” Hearing this, Jesus said to Jairus, “Don’t be afraid; just believe, and she will be healed.” When he arrived at the house of Jairus, he did not let anyone go in with him except Peter, John and James, and the child’s father and mother. Meanwhile, all the people were wailing and mourning for her. “Stop wailing,” Jesus said. “She is not dead but asleep.” They laughed at him, knowing that she was dead. But he took her by the hand and said, “My child, get up!” Her spirit returned, and at once she stood up. Then Jesus told them to give her something to eat. Her parents were astonished, but he ordered them not to tell anyone what had happened. Luke 8:49-56

- Thoughts? Jesus said she is asleep, they say she is dead, yet when Jesus said to get up her “spirit” returned to her. How do we understand all of this?
 - The Greek word translated spirit is pneuma from which we get pneumonia, or pneumatic and means wind or air. In the Bible this word is translated with four different meanings
 - Wind
 - Spirit (both Holy Spirit and our spirit)
 - Breath, including breath of life
 - A mystical apparition called a ghost
 - How do we know which one was meant in this verse?
- After he had said this, he went on to tell them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up.” His disciples replied, “Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better.” Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep. So then he told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.” John 11:11-15
 - What did Jesus call death? Sleep, why?
 - “You will not surely die,” the serpent said to the woman. Genesis 3:4

- God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen. 1Tim 6:15,16
 - If God alone is immortal why do we say humans are immortal?
 - If Adam and Eve could not die then what was God speaking about in the Garden?

Why have some come to believe that mankind is immortal?

- “There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. ²⁰ At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores ²¹ and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. ²² “The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³ In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. ²⁴ 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.’ ²⁵ “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. ²⁶ 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.’ ²⁷ “He answered, ‘Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father’s house, ²⁸ for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’ ²⁹ “Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.’ ³⁰ “ ‘No, father Abraham,’ he said, ‘but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’ ³¹ “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

- Thoughts about this text? Is this real or a parable? Why? Jesus is talking to the people not the disciples the Bible says He only talked in parables to the people (Matthew 13:34, Mark 4:34).
 - The parable has a point and Jesus gave it
 - Some argue that because the name of a person was used it was not a parable because He never used names in parables, but they miss the greater picture. Why the name Lazarus in this parable, because Jesus was doing all He could to help reach the minds of the people. Jesus knew that He was going to raise a real man Lazarus from the dead and hoped by using the name in the parable they would remember the lesson.
 - The rest of the weight of Scripture – the focus of the NT was not on dying and wafting off to heaven, but the Christian hope is in the resurrection, why? Because when our individuality, spirit, goes to heaven safe and secure in Christ, we are unconscious, asleep, not interacting waiting for our new bodies to live again.
- Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. We live by faith, not by sight. We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. 2Cor 5:6-9
 - Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ According to the Lord’s own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede

those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage each other with these words.

- What difficulty is presented in this passage for those who believe in soul sleep? Christ brings with Him those who have fallen asleep, not those who are already resurrected, but those who have fallen asleep. How do we resolve the difficulty?

How do we put all of it together? We must harmonize all the scripture and not make a teaching out of just the parts we like. We must fit together:

- Christ called death a sleep
- The dead resurrected never reported anything
- The Christian church looked forward to resurrection not spirit transportation
- Go back to our memory text, if the disciples were going to die and in a short time waft off to heaven to be with Jesus, why didn't Jesus say, "I go to prepare a place for you and if I go in a short time you will die and come and join me?"
- Paul's comments about absent from the body present with the Lord
- Wages of sin is death, not eternal life in suffering
- God alone is immortal
- Jesus brings with Him those who have fallen asleep
- We must ask, what would it say about God if He were to create beings and put them in a place of torment for all eternity? And What would it say about God if He were not to know the future and give immortality to beings and then be helpless to prevent them from suffering from all eternity?

- What does it say about God if people die and no longer exist?
 - One of the founders of our church wrote the following on this topic: Our **personal identity is preserved in the resurrection, though not the same particles of matter or material substance as went into the grave.** The wondrous works of God are a mystery to man. **The spirit, the character of man, is returned to God, there to be preserved. In the resurrection every man will have his own character.** God in His own time will call forth the dead, giving again the breath of life, and bidding the dry bones live. The same form will come forth, but it will be free from disease and every defect. It lives again bearing the same individuality of features, so that friend will recognize friend. **There is no law of God in nature which shows that God gives back the same identical particles of matter which composed the body before death.** God shall give the righteous dead a body that will please Him. {6BC 1093.2}

Does this help us put it together? Consider a computer/server metaphor with our brains being the computer and the heavenly record books being the server.

MONDAY

Read first paragraph “Not all people...” thoughts? Do we all agree in the end it is our own choice? Then why do so many have God sitting in judgment and making determinations on who is saved and who is lost if the choice is ours? Are we suggesting our choice is unknown until God pronounces it? Are we suggesting that God must investigate to figure out who has accepted and who hasn’t?

Read last paragraph, “But hell also...” thoughts?

What is hell? If the wages of sin is death and the gift of God is eternal life, does God give the gift of eternal life to the wicked so they can live forever in hell? What kind of being would He be if He did?

Where is hell? What are the fires of hell? Do the fires of hell ever go out?

Isaiah 33:14,15, Heb 12:29 (see my blog The Question of punishment Part III).

- A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: “If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, ¹⁰ he, too, will drink of the wine of God’s fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. ¹¹ And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name.”

Revelation 14:9-11

- Where does the burning take place? In the presence of the holy angels and the Lamb -
- Peter Kreeft states: “What is the wrath of God...? Is it real or not? It is real, but it is not part of God himself. God is not half love and half wrath, or 99 percent love and 1 percent wrath. God is love. Wrath is how love appears to us when we sin or rebel or run away from him. The very light that is meant to help us, appears to us as our enemy when we seek the darkness.”

EGW one of the founders of our church wrote:

- **The principles of kindness, mercy, and love, taught and exemplified by our Saviour, are a transcript of the will and character of God.** Christ declared that He taught nothing except that which He had received from

His Father. The principles of the divine government are in perfect harmony with the Saviour's precept, "Love your enemies." God executes justice upon the wicked, for the good of the universe, and even for the good of those upon whom His judgments are visited. He would make them happy if He could do so in accordance with the laws of His government and the justice of His character. He surrounds them with the tokens of His love, He grants them a knowledge of His law, and follows them with the offers of His mercy; but they despise His love, make void His law, and reject His mercy. While constantly receiving His gifts, they dishonor the Giver; they hate God because they know that He abhors their sins. The Lord bears long with their perversity; but the decisive hour will come at last, when their destiny is to be decided. **Will He then chain these rebels to His side?** Will He force them to do His will? {GC 541.4}

Those who have chosen Satan as their leader and have been controlled by his power are not prepared to enter the presence of God. **Pride, deception, licentiousness, cruelty, have become fixed in their characters.** Can they enter heaven to dwell forever with those whom they despised and hated on earth? Truth will never be agreeable to a liar; meekness will not satisfy self-esteem and pride; purity is not acceptable to the corrupt; disinterested love does not appear attractive to the selfish. What source of enjoyment could heaven offer to those who are wholly absorbed in earthly and selfish interests? {GC 542.1}

Could those whose lives have been spent in rebellion against God be suddenly transported to heaven and witness the high, the holy state of perfection that ever exists there,-- every soul filled with love, every countenance beaming with joy, enrapturing music in melodious strains rising in honor of God and the Lamb, and ceaseless streams of light flowing upon the redeemed from the face of Him who sitteth upon the throne,--could those whose hearts are filled with hatred of God, of truth and holiness, mingle with the heavenly throng and join

their songs of praise? **Could they endure the glory of God and the Lamb? No, no;** years of probation were granted them, that they might form characters for heaven; **but they have never trained the mind to love purity; they have never learned the language of heaven, and now it is too late. A life of rebellion against God has unfitted them for heaven. Its purity, holiness, and peace would be torture to them; the glory of God would be a consuming fire.** They would long to flee from that holy place. **They would welcome destruction,** that they might be hidden from the face of Him who died to redeem them. **The destiny of the wicked is fixed by their own choice. Their exclusion from heaven is voluntary with themselves,** and just and merciful on the part of God. {GC 542.2}

Like the waters of the Flood the fires of the great day declare God's verdict **that the wicked are incurable.** They have no disposition to submit to divine authority. Their will has been exercised in revolt; and when life is ended, it is too late to turn the current of their thoughts in the opposite direction, too late to turn from transgression to obedience, from hatred to love. {GC 543.1}

Why do the wicked die in the end? What is hell? Where do the fires arise? Do they ever go out?

TUESDAY

Read first paragraph – thoughts? What does it mean to enter into life, to move from death to life? Why? Life is based on love, the law of love, death occurs when we live in selfishness. We are born selfish, thus we are born terminal. When we accept Jesus, die to self, are converted, allow God to write the law of love on our hearts, we are reborn, new creatures with a new life of love – and love is life! We have crossed over from selfishness (death) to love (life).

WEDNESDAY

Read first paragraph – thoughts? What have you imagined heaven will be like? What kinds of things do you dream about doing in heaven?

- Meeting Jesus, Father, HS
- Meeting your guardian angel – what things would you like to ask your angel?
- Meeting Adam and Eve, Moses, Daniel, John, Enoch
- Finding out who shot JFK
- Travelling to other planets and exploring the universe
- Singing in harmony?
- Flying without a machine?
- Moving objects with your mind?
- Telescopic and microscopic vision?
- Watching the earth recreated after the destruction of the wicked – how might God do it? Might it take six days again and finish with a Sabbath?

THURSDAY

Read second paragraph “We cannot yet imagine...”

Meeting Jesus face to face –

- What questions might you like to ask Jesus?
- What might you want to say to Jesus?

FRIDAY

Read second paragraph “And I saw...” Thoughts? Do the fires go out or do they burn forever?

What fires consume the wicked – in the passage we read earlier the same author writes “Its purity, holiness, and peace would be torture to them; the glory of God would be a consuming fire.”

- "I indeed baptize you in water unto repentance," said John; "but He that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire." Matt. 3:11, R. V., margin. The prophet Isaiah had declared that the Lord would cleanse His people from their iniquities "by the spirit of judgment, and by the spirit of burning." The word of the Lord to Israel was, "I will turn My hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin." Isa. 4:4; 1:25. **To sin, wherever found, "our God is a consuming fire." Heb. 12:29. In all who submit to His power the Spirit of God will consume sin. But if men cling to sin, they become identified with it. Then the glory of God, which destroys sin, must destroy them.** Jacob, after his night of wrestling with the Angel, exclaimed, "I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved." Gen. 32:30. Jacob had been guilty of a great sin in his conduct toward Esau; but he had repented. His transgression had been forgiven, and his sin purged; therefore he could endure the revelation of God's presence. But wherever men came before God while willfully cherishing evil, they were destroyed. At the second advent of Christ the wicked shall be consumed "with the Spirit of His mouth," and destroyed "with the brightness of His coming." 2 Thess. 2:8. **The light of the glory of God, which imparts life to the righteous, will slay the wicked.** {DA 107.4}

Thoughts?

Read question 1 and 2 and discuss