

RESURRECTION DAY IS COMING

If you lost a hand in an accident, would you still be you? In other words, would the same thinking, feeling, sensing, experiencing inner part of you that you identify as “who you are” still be you? Well, of course. What if you lost an arm? A leg? Two legs? Despite the loss of limbs, your inner person would not have changed. You would still be you. What if you were to lose your whole body? Ah!

Yes, the same principle applies here. One day you will lose your body, due to accident, sickness, or just the normal disintegration of aging. But you will still be you. You will simply step away from your body. The Bible teaches loud and clear that the inside person we experience life with will never cease. You and I will live forever. Even if we wanted to cease to exist that would not be possible. So what should we expect after death?

The Bible is discreet in answering the many questions we naturally have about life after death. In this article, I will do my best to give the Biblical answers that are available to us for these questions.

We always want to keep before us the central reason for our existence. We were created for God’s good pleasure. As Mother Teresa once wrote, “God made you because he wanted you.” The highest form of human life is not “Self-Actualization,” per Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, but rather to enjoy God’s company and he, ours. God has always intended that this present existence would be a temporary, formative stage in our life together with him.

Upon death of the body, we will find ourselves in one of two situations: Paradise or Hades. Paradise is where those who love God will find themselves. They will be with Jesus, with bright angels of heaven, and with loved ones who themselves loved God in this life. Those who did not love God will find themselves in Hades. Hades is the waiting room for Hell. It is for those who rejected God in this life. It will be a place of dreary sorrowfulness, anger, fear, and gloom. No one pleasant will be found there. There will be no second chance at heaven. Nor will these people want a second chance. There is nothing in them that likes God, or is attracted to him, to holiness, or to real love. While they surely will find Hades unpleasant, they would dislike even more being in the presence of God.

Years ago I was asked to visit a man who did not have long to live. The hope of his family was that I might be able to lead him to Christ before he died. I sat in a chair beside his bed, the room darkened and shades drawn, trying to put some enthusiasm in my voice as I talked to this unresponsive man. He said not one word



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as I spoke about the confidence we can have in Jesus. When I finished, I asked him, “Would you like to receive Jesus Christ into your life?” He turned away from me, rolled over to face the other wall, and in a clear, firm voice said, “What I would like is to be left alone.” I got up and left.

God will respect that request too. If we insist, he will leave us alone, hearts hardened in rebellion, anger, rage, and self-centeredness.

But back to Paradise. There is reason to believe from the Bible that those in Paradise can see what is going on here with us—or at least, if they wish to. Are they actively helping us out? I do not know. I’m not aware that the Bible has any hint of a suggestion along those lines. Maybe they are. But we do have all the help we could possibly need in the heavens already by the presence of our Lord and Savior Jesus. Still, if God chooses to help me with my needs by sending an angel, or Mary the mother of Jesus, or one of the Catholic saints, or even my deceased father, that suits me just fine. I will leave that up to him.

Those in Paradise look forward to resurrection day. On that day, we who love God will receive our new bodies. In fact, everyone, whether in Paradise or Hades, will be resurrected. Read these words from the Apostle Paul, on trial for his life: “I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.” (Acts 24:14)

What will our resurrection bodies look like? The Apostle Paul discouraged his congregations from worrying over this kind of question. Yet, he did say this: “So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised 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 natural body, it is raised a

spiritual body... And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.” (1 Cor 15:42-49) From this text and others, I gather that our new bodies will be physical, like Jesus’ resurrection body, but also like his, operating under different laws of physics! We will be recognizable to each other. My strong guess is that our bodies will exactly mirror the quality and character of our souls. Even now, the adult countenance tends to take on the quality of the person’s soul, though certainly not exactly. We will be able to greet, hug, speak with, and walk with one another. We can have every expectation that our resurrection body will be fully formed, vigorous, and “adult-like.” Those who died in abortion, or childhood, or those whose bodies in this phase of our existence were deformed and incomplete can be expected to carry wonderfully complete, beautiful, and perfect bodies forever. I also suspect that our new bodies will glow with light. Those who are resurrected from Hades on the other hand, will be visibly darkened.

Then all human beings will stand before Jesus to be judged. (Rom 2:16) Next week, I hope to expand on what that judgment will be like and why the Apostle Paul himself would say in the text quoted earlier, “So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.” Two extremes are seen in the Church as we think about standing before God in judgment and giving an account for our lives. One extreme are those who, having accepted Christ, now live oblivious to the fact that a day of reckoning is still at hand. The other extreme are believers who live in such fear of judgment they live almost paralyzed by the thought of their sins.

It is a good thing to be afraid of God. We love him, but we fear him as well. Our hope in judgment is that our sins have been absolved by what Jesus Christ did for us on his cross. In that sense we who trust Christ have already passed the Day of Judgment. Jesus took our sins upon himself and was judged in our place. The Judgment will reveal our life. That life in turn will reveal whether we really did trust and love God. That day will also be the occasion of being rewarded for faithfulness in the small things God entrusted us with in this life. But more on this next week.

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