

August 29, 2021

When You Die

Please note that this article is entitled “**When** You die;” the title is not “**If** You die.” Unless the Lord comes first (cf. I Thess. 4:13-18), everyone now living will die. The Bible says “*it is appointed for man to die once, but after this the judgment*” (Heb. 9:27). Of all the persons who have ever lived, only two escaped death — Enoch, who was “*taken away so that he did not see death*” (Heb. 11:5), and Elijah, who “*went up by a whirlwind into heaven*” (2 Kings 2:11). It is common for people to say that “only two things are certain — death and taxes.” However, “by hook or crook,” it may be possible to avoid paying taxes, but no amount of caution or conniving can permanently prevent your dying.

Because of the uncertainty regarding what lies beyond the grave, because of the universality of sin (Rom. 3:23), plus a gnawing awareness of sin in our own lives, there is a common “*fear of death*” (Heb. 2:17) that wells up in the hearts and minds of sane, sober-minded people. For many reasons, death has its “*sting*” (I Cor. 15:55). Without doubt, this is one reason why death is often called “the grim reaper.”

Inasmuch as death is so uncertain (as to the **when**), and so inevitable, it surely behooves us to give consideration to what happens when a person passes from this life. By so doing, we gain a better perspective concerning what is really important, and we become more prone to make preparation for the eternity which lies beyond the death of the body. In order to determine what happens at death, we must turn to the manual provided by the One Who created us in His “own *image*” (Gen. 1:26-27), the One in Whom “*we live and move and have our being*” (Acts 17:28), and Who, having conquered death, has “*the keys of Hades and Death*” (Rev. 1:18). Of course, the “manual” to which we just made reference is the Bible, elsewhere called “*the word of God*” (Heb. 4:12). So, based upon the “*word*” of that holy One Who “*cannot lie*” (Tit. 1:2), we ask, “**what will happen when you die?**”

1. You will continue to exist! Death is a word which means “separation” (not annihilation). It occurs when the spirit separates itself from, or moves out of the body. The Bible says “*the body without the spirit is dead...*” (Jas. 2:26). Long after Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had died, God said to Moses, “*I am..the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob*” (Ex. 3:6), and Jesus (commenting upon this same Scripture) said that “*God is not the God of the dead, but of the living*” (Matt. 22:32). Yes, far be it from ever happening, you can commit suicide, but you cannot cease to exist!

2. You will not return to the earth. The doctrine of reincarnation is false. You will be judged “*according to the things done in the body*” — not “bodies” (plural), but “*body*” (singular), 2 Cor. 5:10. Physically, you will “*die once*” (Heb. 9:27); you will not return at another time and place in a different body and later die again.

3. You will leave all your earthly possessions behind. When we die, we leave behind all that we have and take with us all that we are. Scripture says, “*we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out*” (I Tim 6:7). It is therefore little wonder that Tillotson said that “he who provides for this life, but takes no care for eternity, is wise for a moment, but a fool forever!”

4. Your influence, for good or evil, will live on. Abel, the second son of Adam and Eve (Gen. 4:1,2), serves as a Bible example which illustrates this point. Inspiration tells us that “*By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts, and through it he being dead still speaks*” (Heb. 11:4). Children do not inherit the guilt of their parents’ transgressions (Ezek. 18:20), but they often suffer the consequences. Hence, we are not surprised that God said to Israel, “*I the Lord you God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me*” (Ex. 20:5). For that matter, personal observation tells us that the child of a deceased, God-fearing pillar in the community has certain this-world advantages over the child of a hardened criminal slain in an escape attempt. Who can deny the negative legacy of Charles Darwin who did so much to promote belief in Evolution, or the positive legacy of the martyred apostle Paul who so earnestly preached the necessity of faith in Jesus Christ? Yes, friend, long after you are dead, and long after your heirs have either squandered or invested what you leave behind, your influence will live on. Like Abel, after your death, you will continue to “*speak.*”

5. You will either be better off or worse off. The Bible often speaks of “*Hades,*” described by W.E. Vine as “the region of departed spirits” (**Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words**). It serves as an intermediate realm between death and the judgment. When Jesus died, His body was buried in Joseph’s “*new tomb*” (Matt. 27:60), but His soul went to “*Hades,*” where it remained for that short period between His death and His resurrection (Acts 2:30-31). On the other hand, the unprepared “*rich man*” died, was buried, and suffered “*torments in hades,*” the general abode of the dead wherein there is “*a great gulf fixed*” which separates the tormented unregenerate from the comforted redeemed (Luke 16:19-31). In view of these facts, is it any wonder that the Psalmist said “*Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints*” (Ps. 116:18)? And are we really surprised to note that God said “*I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked*” (Ezek. 33:11)? Friend, if you were to die this instant, would God consider your passing “*precious,*” or an event in which He would take “*no pleasure?*”

6. Your eternal fate will be sealed! Yes, the final judgment will occur when “*the Son of Man comes in His glory*” (Matt. 25:31-32), at which time He will judge us by His “*word*” (John 17:48). But “*at the judgment seat of Christ*” before which we must all appear, each one will “*receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad*” (2 Cor. 5:10). The Bible says nothing whatever about a “purgatory” to which souls are consigned and from which they may later emerge because of the paying and praying of loving survivors. Even as no one is ever granted a second chance to make a good first impression, no person will be granted a second life on earth in order to make preparation for eternity. Reportedly, a sleep walker arose from bed, walked out of the house, began crossing a stream of water, and finally awakened when his bare feet touched the cold water. Tragically, multitudes do not awaken to their own lost condition until they begin to cross the chilly waters of death.. And then it is eternally too late!

Conclusion:

Hubert Eaton, founder of Forest Lawn Memorial Park in Glendale, CA, became a

millionaire by trying to soften the harshness of death for movie stars and other famous people. Here their bodies lie, surrounded by marble statuaries, sparkling fountains, and rolling lawns. But beautiful surroundings for the decomposing physical bodies of the lost cannot compensate for the torment of the soul in Hades!

It has been said that when William Sidney Porter was dying, he said, “Turn up the lights! I don’t want to go home in the dark!” Friend, Jesus Christ is “*the light of the world*” (John 8:12). Yes, borrowing Porter’s terminology, you must sooner or later “go home,” but you don’t have to “go home in the dark!” We have all heard of “deathbed repentance,” but not one of us has ever heard of a person, on his deathbed repenting for being a Christian!

Friend, are **you** saved? Do you **know** that you are saved? In view of the uncertainty of life, the certainty of death, the length of eternity, the horrors of hell, and the joys of heaven, you can not afford to live any longer in a state of fear or doubt. With Bible in hand, this writer, or another member of this congregation, would be thrilled to study God’s word with you in person, and to show you the way that leads to life eternal — to that celestial city where you can eat eternally of the tree of life, drink the water of life, and bask forever in the love and fellowship of God.

—Bobby Witherington
