

Hebrews 9:26b-28  
What Happens When You Die:  
Judgment and Victory  
Sunday October 16<sup>th</sup>, 2016

The story is told of a rather snooty gentleman who walked into the restaurant and demanded to speak to the chef. In a few minutes a rather burley chef walks out wiping his hands on his apron none-to-pleased to be out of the kitchen at the rush hour

The snooty gentleman demanded, "I must know how you prepare your chicken?"

The chef without even blinking an eye says, "I got to be honest with you. We tell them right up front they're not going to make it."

I got to let you know right up front too, that none of us are going to make it out of this world alive. So today, once again, we are going to look at what happens when we die in terms of Judgment and Victory.

Hebrews 9:27-28 speak of this Judgment and Victory for Christians, "And just as it is appointed for mortals to die once, and after that the judgement,

so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many,

will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him."

We only have to go through this life once (we die only once) and then we go to heaven through the judgment. For some that have had very hard lives that is a comfort, and for others a sadness, but for Christians we only have to do this life once!!!! The closest we get to any concept of reincarnation is the Resurrection, which we will begin to work with next week.

Now I have officiated at probably over 500 funeral & memorial services and about half of those were for non-church-attendees. I found

among them an almost universal belief that their loved one was going to go to heaven except in one case, which was tragically odd. They were all rather glad to see the person dead and left me with the impression they never wanted to see them again, nor would they in any sort of afterlife.

But there is a common belief in America in what I would call “Universal Salvation.” The “All Dogs Go to Heaven” approach to the afterlife. But the Bible as I read it; and even a casual reading of the New Testament doesn’t support this. And if God is a just God and we go through this life once, **“are the evil to be rewarded just as much as the good?”** No the Bible says there is going to be a Judgment.

Now of what form or type of judgment is it for Christians? Do all people face the same Judgment? What I am going to say next is going to surprise some of you, but as you study the scriptures, you will observe there are going to be two judgments after death. There is going to be one judgment for “the righteous” and one judgment for “the unrighteous”.

There is going to be one judgment for **“salvation and victory”** and one for **“condemnation”**. Believers and the righteous will stand before what is called the **“Bema”** judgment seat. Those who have lived their lives in rebellion to God and the unrighteous will stand before the **“Great White Throne”** judgment seat, which we read about in our Rev. passage.

Now the Greek word **“Bema”** which is the judgment seat of Jesus for believers and the righteous means **“step”** in Greek. The word literally means “step”. It is a reference to the ancient Olympic Greek games and even in the modern day Olympics you can see the same thing.



Take a look at the victory platform. It has three steps: one for first place, one for second and one for third. These “steps” that these athletes are standing on are places of judgment. They are places of victory. To stand there means you have been **judged victorious!**

As the scripture says we die once and then there is “the judgment”. For Christians it is a judgment of **“well done good and faithful servant”**. When we die in this life as believers we will ascend to glory immediately to be welcomed by Jesus Christ into Heaven. As Dr. Ashbrook says, who wrote one of the studies I am using, “When we draw our last breath here on earth, we’ll draw our next breath in Paradise!”

We die once and then there is the judgment. But it is a judgment of victory and glory!!!

The judgment for Christians is not a time of fear, but a time of joy and celebration. When we die it is a time of celebration for what is to immediately come.

Now as to the second judgment, “the Great White Throne Judgment” we read about this in Revelation 20:11-12 and 15, which says, **“Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them.**

**And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life.**

**The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. If anyone’s name was not found in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”**

We as Christians skip this “Last Judgment” because on our death we go straight to Heaven and the presence of Christ to await the general resurrection of the dead and the New Heaven and Earth.

Now no one really wants to talk about “judgment” or being held accountable in our society today. Even those who do great evil, or attempt to do great evil, some people attempt to avoid labeling what they do as evil, but if there is no evil there is no need for judgment or justice, or even the forgiveness of sin.

Why practice social justice or any other type of justice if the outcome is the same in the hereafter?

There is no need for **“Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many...”** Note it says “many” not “all”. Jesus’ death was for all sin and sinners, but not all chose to partake of this forgiveness. A current Jewish philosopher and talk show host Dennis Prager, put it this way, **“If God does not judge between the good and evil than God is irrelevant.”** I have been thinking about that statement for weeks. But practically, morally what is the difference between a belief in Universal Salvation and Libertinism? Both believe you get the same result. To me it would seem to hold either of these positions that God doesn’t care about suffering and evil.

Now, again, I know talking about the Judgment of God is not very popular in our culture and society today and whenever I do talk about it the following questions come up about what happens after we die.

First one I usually hear is **“Well if we need to respond and believe in Jesus Christ to be saved how about all those who lived before Christ was even born?”** Awesome question, in the Apostles Creed ecumenical version there is a phrase, **“He descended to the dead.”** My Lutheran friends say “He descended to Hell.” This harks back to the Old Testament understanding of Sheol that moves into the NT in the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus.

Jesus, after he died on the cross, went to the place of the dead and preached there. All who responded he took to heaven. This is why in Ephesians 4:8-10 it says: **“When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people.”** (What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions?)

He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.)

Ancient sources say the captives he lead to heaven were all those who believed. And where do we get it that he “descended to the dead to preach?” 1 Peter 4:6 says, “**For this is the reason the gospel was preached, even to those who are now dead,**

**so that they might be judged according to human standards in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit.”**

The second major question I get is “**how about the people who live today who do not hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ in order to be given the opportunity to respond?**” Because remember we are saved through faith.

Both OT and NT give about the same answer. OT Psalm 62:12 “**and with you, Lord, is unfailing love**”; and, “**You reward everyone according to what they have done.**”

NT teaches the same principle. *Paul writes that God “will render to every man according to his works.” (Rom. 2:6) and Peter reminds his readers that God “judges each one impartially according to his deeds.” (1 Peter 1:17). The issue is not salvation by works but works as the irrefutable evidence of a man’s actual relationship with God. Man is saved by faith, but faith is inevitably revealed by the works it produces.”*

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Remember I have said faith always has an active component. It is a turning to God. It is repentance. God in Christ will always do the saving.

And now finally the most difficult question I get has to do with the question of **the death of babies and children**. I know for some this will be a difficult discussion, but we need to talk and hear; so that we can minister to ourselves and others. I found myself getting pretty emotional as I thought about this section, because of my work with parents and

brothers and sisters of children and infants who have died. So if you need to cry go ahead some of my memories made me cry.

You can never have the right words to say, but I believe the absolute wrong thing to say is, “God took your baby because he needed another angle in heaven.” That is horribly cruel, and I believe taking the name of the Lord in vain to say such. And even being a pastor I have considered punching someone for saying such a dumb and hurtful thing, but at times we just step in it.

About 2 years ago I was with several small children; two older sisters and a younger brother. The little boy was driving his sisters and me crazy and the girls weren’t being too nice to him either. I said to them, “he needs a brother to play with.” I then I said, “You need to ask your mother to get a brother for him.” One girl’s immediate reply was, “O, my mom can’t have any more kids.”

The little boy then replied, “O, I did have a brother, a twin but he died when we were in the womb.” Then one girl said, “Yes and my mom lost a little girl named ?????. She miscarried. Actually she miscarried more than once. She can’t have any more kids.” Then the little boy said, “Yes, when we get to heaven we will meet them.” They have good Christian parents.

I must confess that was one of the most awkward conversations I have had and found out more about their family than I ever wanted to know, but I also realized they had some great theology.

Children, babies and infants, the still born, miscarried and aborted will all wind up in heaven, not simply because they are innocent. We are all born sinners, but because God credits their sin to Christ; and because they are too young to believe. They have not reached the age or stage of life of accountability where they themselves will be held accountable for their choice of faith in Jesus Christ.

*“Christ saw children as being in close proximity to God and the Kingdom of heaven. He said, **“See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven continually see the***

*face of My Father who is in heaven.” (Mt. 18:10) Children are close to the heart of God.” One Minute After You Die p. 76*

I have a pastor friend who told me in fact he believes that when we get very old we become like children again: slow, weak, sleeping a lot etc., because God is preparing us like children to inherit the Kingdom of God.

Now will a baby be a baby forever in heaven? We don't know, but maybe God will let that baby grow up in the arms of its parents. But this we do know: children, babies and the unborn that die will be complete in heaven and more on that next week.

I close with this poem:

*“Is it proper to cry  
For a Baby to small  
For a coffin?  
Yes, I think it is.*

*Does Jesus have  
My too-small baby  
In His tender arms?  
Yes, I think He does.*

*There is so much I do not know  
About you—my child—  
He, she? Quiet or restless?*

*Will I recognize  
Someone I knew so little about,  
Yet loved so much?  
Yes, I think I will.*

*Ah, sweet, small child  
Can I say  
That loving you is like loving God?*

*Loving—yet not seeing,*

*Holding—yet not touching,  
Caressing—yet separated by the chasm of time.*

*No tombstone marks your sojourn,  
And only God recorded your name.*

*The banquet was not canceled,  
Just moved. Just moved.  
Yet a tear remains  
Where baby should have been.*

*The Alliance Witness  
16 September 1987, 14  
Used by permission.”*

My friends, *“It is not how long you live but the contribution you make that matters. And yes, these little ones have made their contribution too—they have opened the hearts of their loved ones to the realization that we are all headed toward home”* toward God in heaven. *One Minute After You Die p. 78-79*

In Jesus' name amen.