

Psalm 49:5-20
What Happens When You Die: Old Testament
Sunday October 2nd, 2016

Today we begin a 6 week series on what the Bible reveals to us happens when we die. We begin with the Old Testament on this World Wide Communion Sunday and we will end on All Saints with Holy Communion and Paradise.

We will peek through the veil to get a glimpse of what is in store for us. We will approach this with hope, humor and faith.

Now a story is told about *“A Sunday school teacher who asked her class of 5 and 6 year old students the following questions. They had been studying faith in Jesus and this was a verbal test.*

She asked, “If I sold my house and my car, and gave all my stuff to the church rummage sale, would I get into heaven?”

The bright children chimed together, “NO!”

“If I cleaned the church every day, raked all the rocks, picked all the weeds, and kept everything neat and tidy, would I get to heaven?”

Again their response was a united, “NO!”

So, she then asked, “How can I get to heaven?”

A bright 5 year old from the back shouted, “I know, I know. You gotta be dead!”

Mickey's Funnies

Well another story is told of *“An exasperated mother, whose son was always getting into mischief, she finally asked him, “How do you expect to get into heaven?”*

The boy thought for a moment and said, “Well, when I get to the pearly gates I’ll just run in and out and in and out and keep slamming

the door until St. Peter says, "For heaven's sake, Jimmy, come in or stay out!"

Mickey's Funnies

Well, we all know how to get to heaven. It is through faith in Jesus Christ, but the mystery and joy of the Gospel is that Heaven is just a resting place. God has something even better in mind than heaven, which he reveals in the scripture and we will study in the coming weeks.

Now this series was inspired by discussion I had with a man named Larry who was in Peppi's House hospice here in Tucson. Peppi's is near TMC. I visited Larry at the hospice and he was given only about a week to 10 days to live, when I saw him. At that time I was also doing a Bible Study on the Book of Revelation that has a lot to say about what happens when we die, and the Resurrection of the Dead at the end of time. So Larry and I had a good talk that prepared his heart and mind and soul for what was soon to come. It's sooner for us than any of us wants to know.

Now, **this study has 6 parts: O T today, N T next week, victory and judgement, the resurrection body, the New Jerusalem and finally Paradise.** My intent is to inspire and encourage you with the hope of eternal life and the Resurrection of the Dead.

We start with the Old Testament understanding with Psalm 49. The background for this psalm is that it was written after the Exile when the Jews returned to the Promised Land vastly diminished in wealth, power and status. They were oppressed and occupied by nations and people who were wealthy and powerful; and the temptation was to abandon God for trust in wealth, power and position.

Verses 5 and 6 are a riddle that the Psalm answers. **Why should I fear in times of trouble, when the iniquity of my persecutors surrounds me, those who trust in their wealth and boast of the abundance of their riches?**

The answer comes directly in verses 7-9 and 10-11 that are then elaborated. Verses 7-9 make the point that money can't buy life, verses 10-11 that wisdom and power can't buy life. Death is the great

equalizer. As verse 17 says, **“For when they die they will carry nothing away; their wealth will not go down after them.”** And neither will any degrees or honors or places of prestige and power go with them. Death strips it all away. In this world all comes to naught.

Now, “The Old Testament offers no formal doctrine concerning the destination and fate of the dead;” The teachings we find in the Old Testament were rather vague and generally accepted by all the religions in the area at the time. Throughout the Mideast at that time there was a generally accepted idea of what the afterlife was and it wasn’t too inviting.

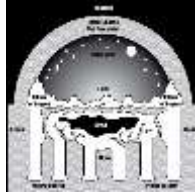
In the OT there was no real belief in Resurrection. When you were dead you were dead. The Sadducees and Pharisees argument with each other, that Paul so cleverly instigated, was based on this. As Acts 23:8 says, **“The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, or angel, or spirit; but the Pharisees acknowledge all three.”**

The OT like the NT acknowledges that our souls continue on after we die, but their abode was not seen as a particularly happy place. It was not Heaven. It was the realm of the dead. The common word used for it 63 times in the OT by the NRSV is **Sheol**.

Other words used to describe where the souls of the departed went are: **the Pit, realm of the dead, the nether world, perdition, and Abaddon**. But Sheol is the primary word and concept so what does it mean?

In the OT there were four major aspects to the concept of Sheol. First, it was not the grave where the body lies, but the realm of the spirits. It was thought of as underneath the earth. And in some cases it was thought to be located in the West where the sun set. But most general it was thought to lie beneath the earth. That is why in verse 17 its says, **“their wealth will not GO DOWN after them.”**

Here is a picture of the cosmology of the time. This is how they thought the created order approximately looked.



The second major idea attached to Sheol was that it was a shadowy place. It was as dark and dreary as the souls that arrived there. It was full of shades.

Third, on a more positive note, it was a place where you could be reunited with your ancestors. Gen. 49:33 says, “When Jacob ended his charge to his sons, he drew up his feet into the bed, breathed his last, and was *gathered to his people*.”

Fourth, and this wasn't highly developed, Sheol had different regions in it. It had a place for the foolish and the wicked and a place for the wise and righteous. The wicked, Psalm 49:13, “Such is the fate of the foolhardy, the end of those who are pleased with their lot. And the righteous, verse 15, “But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol for he will receive me.”

There was not a lot of hope and excitement for the afterlife. What matter above all was this life. Psalm 6:5 “For in death there is no remembrance of you; in Sheol who can give you praise?” In fact it was often times described as a dry and weary land where there is no water.

But hints of heaven and the Resurrection can be found in the OT. Again, verse 15 holds a hint of this, “But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me.” God here is referred to as one who would pay ransom, a redeemer.

Daniel 12:2 says, “Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.” Here the idea of resurrection is beginning to be revealed by God as well as an eternal judgement.

And Job 19:25-26 “For I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth; and after my skin has been thus

destroyed, then in my flesh I shall see God,” Here the idea and even the prophecy of Jesus as the Redeemer is revealed. Job is trusting that God will be his redeemer after his life here on earth has ended.

Deuteronomy 29:29 reminds us as we approach this study, “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the revealed things belong to us and to our children forever, to observe all the words of this law.

There was a revelation and enlightenment that was proper for the OT and then in God’s timing, in the fullness of time God sent further revelation. There are things that are revealed in the scripture for us to know and the rest we must simply leave to God. I say this because there are a lot of people going around saying what happens when we die but the most reliable source we have is the Bible and it is mostly silent.

So in the OT we see Sheol as the place for the good and the bad. Later we see there are places within Sheol which in the NT are most often called Heaven and Hell, which we will look at more next week through the parable of Lazarus.

One great OT revelation that continues into the NT is that upon death we will be conscious of who we are and when we pass over we will recognize loved ones. And as I said earlier what God has in store for us is actually better and more than just Heaven.

What we will be and where we will be we don’t completely know for as Paul said, “We see dimly now as through a mirror. But what it will be will be fantastic. “No eye has seen, no ear has heard no mind has conceived what God prepared for those who love him.”

When I was at Christ Church the death of one of our very quiet members was reported to me by the Stephen Minister who was with him when he died. His name was Bo. He was a very quiet serious type of person. I don’t think I ever really heard him speak enough to ever be able to recognize his voice. I don’t think I ever saw him smile. But when he died he was grinning from ear to ear looking off into heaven saying “Boy O Boy O Boy” and then he was gone.

We don't know what he saw, but it was beautiful. Our understanding of what happens when we die, of Heaven, maybe as indistinct and beautiful as that and the picture on the cover of our bulletin.



So I want you to hang onto this beautiful thought as we look as deeply as we can into what happens when we die.

And know this; at times the veil grows thin between Heaven and Earth. Holy Communion is such a time. As we commune here today, on World Communion Sunday, we commune with Christian believers worldwide.

We commune with God in Jesus Christ. We commune with all who have ever received communion. We commune with all who will.

We commune with the living, the dead, those unborn and those yet to be conceived and born.

Yes! Boy, O Boy, O Boy, O boy. Let's anticipate what's to come as we sing, "I Know My Redeemer Lives".

In Jesus' name amen.