

HEAVEN'S PERSPECTIVE ON DEATH

John 11:11-46

(Jn 11), “Now a certain *man* was snnick, *named* Lazarus, of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. ² (It was *that* Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.) ³ Therefore his sisters sent unto him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick. ⁴ When Jesus heard *that*, he said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby. ⁵ Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus. ⁶ When he had heard therefore that he was sick, he abode two days still in the same place where he was. ⁷ Then after that saith he to *his* disciples, Let us go into Judea again. ⁸ His disciples say unto him, Master, the Jews of late sought to stone thee; and goest thou thither again? ⁹ Jesus answered, Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world. ¹⁰ But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him. ¹¹ These things said he: and after that he saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep. ¹² Then said his disciples, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well. ¹³ Howbeit Jesus spake of his death: but they thought that he had spoken of taking of rest in sleep. ¹⁴ Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead. ¹⁵ And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe; nevertheless let us go unto him. ¹⁶ Then said Thomas, which is called Didymus, unto his fellow disciples, Let us also go, that we may die with him. ¹⁷ Then when Jesus came, he found that he had *lain* in the grave four days already. ¹⁸ Now Bethany was nigh unto Jerusalem, about fifteen furlongs off: ¹⁹ And many of the Jews came to Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother. ²⁰ Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met him: but Mary sat *still* in the house. ²¹ Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. ²² But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give *it* thee. ²³ Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again. ²⁴ Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. ²⁵ Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: ²⁶ And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this? ²⁷ She saith unto him, Yea, Lord: I

believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world. ²⁸ And when she had so said, she went her way, and called Mary her sister secretly, saying, The Master is come, and calleth for thee. ²⁹ As soon as she heard *that*, she arose quickly, and came unto him. ³⁰ Now Jesus was not yet come into the town, but was in that place where Martha met him. ³¹ The Jews then which were with her in the house, and comforted her, when they saw Mary, that she rose up hastily and went out, followed her, saying, She goeth unto the grave to weep there. ³² Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying unto him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. ³³ When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled, ³⁴ And said, Where have ye laid him? They said unto him, Lord, come and see. ³⁵ Jesus wept. ³⁶ Then said the Jews, Behold how he loved him! ³⁷ And some of them said, Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died? ³⁸ Jesus therefore again groaning in himself cometh to the grave. It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it. ³⁹ Jesus said, Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been *dead* four days. ⁴⁰ Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God? ⁴¹ Then they took away the stone *from the place* where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up *his* eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. ⁴² And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said *it*, that they may believe that thou hast sent me. ⁴³ And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. ⁴⁴ And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go. ⁴⁵ Then many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him. ⁴⁶ But some of them went their ways to the Pharisees, and told them what things Jesus had done.”

WHILE IN **COLLEGE**, I remember preaching a sermon from John 11. As a young preacher, I remember **how difficult** it was to get a handle on such a huge chapter. **The way** to get a handle on such massive information is to find **THE MAJOR THEME** that binds the text together. One of the major

themes of John 11, if not THE MAJOR THEME, IS **DEATH**. Jesus was teaching His disciples about death. They would never be effective witnesses in a hostile world apart from heaven's perspective on death. The same is true for us.

Death sometimes causes a person to **question the promises** of God. In John 11 Jesus simply **ANSWERS those questions in advance**. **Since death impacts us all**, it is important that we seek to understand what God has to say about death.



I have read that located in a **CEMETERY IN INDIANA** is a **TOMBSTONE** that is more than one hundred years old. Written on it is the following **EPITAPH**:

Pause Stranger, when you pass me by,
As you are now, so once was I
As I am now, so you will be,
So prepare for death and follow me.

An unknown passerby read those words and underneath scratched this reply:

To follow you I'm not content,
Until I know which way you went.

James S. Hewett, Illustrations Unlimited (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 1988) p. 145.

(V. 1), "**Now a certain man was SICK, named LAZARUS, . . .**"

S We do not know what kind of **SICKNESS** Lazarus had, but we do know that it was **so serious** that it resulted in his death.

(V. 1), "**. . . OF BETHANY . . .**"

S Bethany was a village located about **two miles east** of Jerusalem on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives. It was located on, or near, the road to Jericho.

(V. 1), "**. . . the town of MARY and her sister MARTHA.**"

S The town of Bethany was **distinguished** by the fact that it was **HOME** to **Lazarus, Mary and Martha**.

(V. 3), "**Therefore his sisters SENT UNTO HIM, [i.e., Jesus] . . .**"

S If Jesus was still located at the place where John first baptized, as He was at the conclusion of John 10 (John 10:40; John 11:40; 1:28), then He was from **twenty to thirty miles** from Bethany. Thirty miles would make for a long day journey by foot.

THE CONTENT OF THEIR MESSAGE:

(V. 3), "**. . . Lord, behold, HE WHOM THOU LOVEST IS SICK.**"

JESUS' RESPONSE:

(V. 4), "**When Jesus heard that, he said, 'This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby.'**"

JESUS' ACTION:

(V. 6-7), "**When he had heard therefore that he was sick, HE ABODE TWO DAYS STILL IN THE SAME PLACE WHERE HE WAS. {7} THEN AFTER THAT saith he to his disciples, 'Let us go into Judea again.'**"

S WHY DID JESUS DELAY?

(1) JESUS DID **NOT LACK UNDERSTANDING OF THE SEVERITY** of Lazarus' condition. Jesus told His disciples before they left on their trip to Bethany that Lazarus was **already dead**. (V. 14).

- (2) JESUS DID **NOT LACK COURAGE**. When it came time to go to Bethany, Jesus took His disciples and went. When they were afraid to go with Him, He taught them how to **walk courageously** into the face of danger (V. 9).
- (3) JESUS DID **NOT LACK COMPASSION** for Martha, Mary and Lazarus. Three times our text spoke of Jesus' "**love**" (VV. 3, 5, 36). Jesus was so moved at the death of Lazarus that He "**wept**" (V. 35).
- (4) JESUS DID **NOT LACK POWER!** Jesus **had the ability to heal** Lazarus right on the spot. Jesus had earlier healed a little boy in Capernaum while He, Jesus, was in Cana of Galilee some **20 miles** away.

SINCE JESUS DID NOT LACK UNDERSTANDING, COURAGE, COMPASSION or POWER, THEN WHY didn't Jesus drop everything and go help his good friend Lazarus in a time of great need? The only explanation was that GOD HAD **DEEPER PURPOSES**. The previous message presented **SIX PURPOSES IN GOD'S DELAY**.

SOMETIMES GOD DELAYS:

- #1. TO **DEMONSTRATE GOD'S LOVE** (tough love)
- #2. TO **DRIVE US CLOSER TO GOD** (had to tell Jesus)
- #3. TO **REVEAL TO US WHO WE REALLY ARE** (fire reveals)
- #4. TO **STRENGTHEN OUR FAITH** (Deut. 8:2-3; 1 Pe 1:7)
- #5. TO **PROVIDE GREATER GLORY** (VV. 4; 40)
- #6. TO **PROMOTE A GREATER JOY**

S JERRY VINES

"Sometimes God digs the wells of joy with the Spade of Sorrow"

(Jerry Vines, *Exploring the Gospels – Mark*, pg 79)

ANOTHER PURPOSE might well have been for Jesus to have a **powerful platform** from which **to present eternal truths**. God's Word tends to have greater impact upon us when we are personally experiencing the subject being discussed.

This past Sunday I preached **part two** of the message titled "**REASONS WHY GOD DELAYS**." The message had so much information that it took two Sundays to preach. After completing the second part of that message, a hurting parent met me in the hall and said, "I am glad you didn't preach all that message last week. God knew what we were going to need this week." Those parents had experienced a heartbreaking experience a few days previous. **The point is**—messages tend to have **greater impact** when we are personally experiencing the subject being presented.

WHEN JESUS TOOK His disciples to Bethany, **THE SUBJECT OF DEATH WAS STRONG UPON THEIR MINDS**.

- (1) THEY WERE CONCERNED THAT **JESUS MIGHT BE KILLED**.
(**V. 8**), "His disciples say unto him, Master, the Jews of late sought to **stone thee**; and goest thou thither again?"

It was true that Jesus was **just a few weeks** from His arrest, trial and crucifixion.

- (2) THEY WERE CONCERNED **THEY MIGHT BE KILLED, TOO**.
(**V. 16**), "Then said **THOMAS**, which is called Didymus, unto his fellow disciples, 'Let us also go, that we may **DIE** with him.'"
- (3) **LAZARUS WAS DEAD**.
(**V. 14**), "Then said Jesus unto them plainly, **LAZARUS IS DEAD**."

WHEN Jesus and His disciples arrived in Bethany, Lazarus had already been **DEAD FOR FOUR DAYS** (V. 17).

S Faced with the prospect of **JESUS' DEATH, THEIR DEATH**, and **THE DEATH OF LAZARUS**, there was **no doubt** that the disciples were **open** for Jesus **to present heaven's perspective** on death.

S JESUS KNEW HIS DISCIPLES WOULD NEVER BE EFFECTIVE MISSIONARIES in a hostile world without **God's perspective** on death. They would **either be ruled by** the fear of death, or be ruled by the Word of God. They would either **walk by faith** or run in **fear**.

THE SAME IS TRUE FOR US. IF WE do not have God's perspective on death, we will be **ruled by fear** rather than be ruled by faith. **How many CHRISTIANS** through the years have told God, "I can't do what you have asked because I might die."? How many **PARENTS** have refused to encourage their children in the service of the Lord for fear they might suffer? The dread of death **has kept MULTITUDES** through the ages from being effective ministers of the Lord. It is absolutely essential that we have **HEAVEN'S PERSPECTIVE ON DEATH.**

I remember as a little boy being somewhat **AFRAID OF DEATH.** When the glands in my neck would swell because of an infection, I would wonder if I had cancer. I had an element of fear related to death even as a little boy. The single greatest relief from my fear was my **salvation experience.** With that salvation experience came a heavenly perspective that **turned** the fear of death into an **anticipation** of better things to come if death did occur.

JAMES 1:5 tells us to ask God for wisdom and He will provide it. God will give wisdom without chastising us for asking. **WISDOM IS** God's perspective on life. John 11 presents God's wisdom on death.

- I. JESUS' **PROCLAMATION** ABOUT DEATH
- II. JESUS' **PERSPECTIVE** ON DEATH
- III. JESUS' **POWER** OVER DEATH

I. JESUS' PROCLAMATION ABOUT DEATH

(V. 25-26), "Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were **DEAD**, yet shall he live: ²⁶ And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never **DIE.** Believest thou this?"

S The words "**DIE**", "**DEAD**", or "**DEATH**" OCCUR **16 TIMES** in John 11. IN CONTRAST the words "**LIFE**" or "**LIVE**" occur only **THREE TIMES.** There is no doubt that **A MAJOR THEME OF JOHN 11 IS "DEATH."**

S A close examination of **Jesus' use** of the word "**DEATH**" reveals that it is used in at least **two different ways.**

1. VERSES **14** and **25** REFER TO **PHYSICAL DEATH:**

- **(V. 14)**, "Then said Jesus unto them plainly, **LAZARUS IS DEAD.**"
- **(V. 25)**, "Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were **DEAD**, yet shall he live:"

2. VERSES **4** and **26** REFER TO **ETERNAL DEATH:**

- **(V. 4)**, "When Jesus heard that, he said, This sickness **IS NOT UNTO DEATH**, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby."
- **(V. 26)**, "And whosoever liveth and believeth in me **SHALL NEVER DIE.** Believest thou this?"

When the following three verses are put side by side, they are a bit **PUZZLING.**

- **(V. 4)**, "This sickness **IS NOT UNTO DEATH**"
- **(V. 14)**, "**LAZARUS IS DEAD**"
- **(V. 26)**, "Whosoever liveth and believeth in me **SHALL NEVER DIE**"

The only way to reconcile those three verses is to understand that the Bible presents **different kinds of death.** Consider three kinds of death:

#1. "SPIRITUAL DEATH"

God told Adam:

(Gen 2:17), ". . . **IN THE DAY** that thou eatest thereof **THOU SHALT SURELY DIE.**"

S After they ate, their sin gave birth to a new experience called "**spiritual death**". **Evidence** of Adam and Eve's "spiritual death" was **quick in coming.** When God came to fellowship with them in the Garden, they **hid** from God among the **trees.**

S Their “spiritual death” was **passed on** to their **descendants** in the generations to come. Scripture describes this impact on future generations in the following manner:

- **(1 Cor 15:22)**, “. . . **IN ADAM ALL DIE**, . . . ”

ALL OF US have experienced **spiritual death** (Rom 6:23).

- **(Ro 3:23)**, “For **all** have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;”
- **(Ro 6:23)**, “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

S THIS FACT **composes** THE VERY **SAD STORY** CONCERNING THE ENTIRE HUMAN RACE. It is the explanation as to why there is so much hatred and turmoil on this planet.

#2. “PHYSICAL DEATH”

(Heb 9:27), “And as it is appointed unto men once to **DIE**, but after this the judgment:”

S Physical death is **inevitable**. **Someday** our physical bodies will fail and there will be a separation between our body and our soul.

S **RANDY ALCORN**
“Life's greatest certainty is death. The statistics never change. Of those who are born, 100 percent die.” (Deadline, Pg 65)

S **DEATH IS NO RESPECTER OF PERSONS.**

- **Doctors** die. **Patients** die.
- **Religious** people die. **Atheists** die.
- **Educated** people die. **Uneducated** people die.
- The **Wealthy** die. The **Poor** die.
- **Busy** people die. **Lazy** people die.
- People who **deny death** still die. People who **accept death** still die.

The third kind of death can be described in at least three different ways:

#3. “SECOND DEATH” / “ETERNAL DEATH” / “HELL”

(Re 21:8), “But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is **THE SECOND DEATH.**” (Rev 2:11; 20:6)

S **It has been said**, *If we are born once, we will die twice. If we are born twice, we will only die once.* “**THE SECOND DEATH**” becomes the experience of the person who dies physically without having ever received Jesus as Savior. To die without Jesus as Savior, is to enter into eternal death. That person **DIES ETERNALLY** in a place called **HELL**.

S **JESUS SAID MORE** about hell than any other person in the Bible. In Scripture there are **no words of encouragement** for the person who dies without Christ as their Savior. **NONE!** On the other hand, there are many frightening words. Consider some of the things Jesus had to say about hell.

- **(Mk 9:43-47)**, “And if thy **HAND** offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into **HELL**, into the **fire** that never shall be quenched: ⁴⁴Where their **worm** dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. ⁴⁵And if thy **FOOT** offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into **hell**, into the **fire** that never shall be quenched: ⁴⁶Where their **worm** dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. ⁴⁷And if thine **EYE** offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire:”
- **(Lk 12:5)**, “But I will **FOREWARN YOU** whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him.”
- **THE RICH MAN WOKE UP IN HELL**
(Lk 16:23-26), “And in hell he lift up his eyes, **BEING IN TORMENTS**, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his

bosom. ²⁴ And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and **send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I AM TORMENTED** in this flame. ²⁵ But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. ²⁶ And beside all this, between us and you there is **A GREAT GULF FIXED**: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that *would come* from thence”

- **JESUS SAID**
(Mat 25:30), “And cast ye the unprofitable servant into **OUTER DARKNESS**: there shall be **weeping** and **gnashing of teeth**.”

S “**OUTER DARKNESS**”. Hell will be a place of “**DARKNESS**” because there will be **no “LIGHT.”** The absence of “**LIGHT**”, and the presence of “**DARKNESS**” represents more than just the absence of sun rays. It means that God, who is “light”, will not be there.

- **(1 John 1:5)**, “. . . **GOD IS LIGHT**, and in him is no darkness at all.”
- **(John 8:12)**, “. . . **I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD**: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.”

SCRIPTURE REVEALS **WHY** PEOPLE REJECT “**LIGHT**” IN THIS WORLD:

- **(John 3:19)**, “And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and **MEN LOVED DARKNESS RATHER THAN LIGHT**, because their deeds were evil.”

S This serves as **A WORD OF WARNING** to all who insist on rejecting the “Light.” There exists a place where a person’s desire for “darkness” can be eternally fulfilled. It is called **HELL**. **HELL IS THE PLACE RESERVED FOR ALL WHO INSIST** on rejecting the “**LIGHT**”.

- **A MOTHER HANDED HER SON A GOSPEL TRACT** as he was heading out of the house for a night on the town. He looked at the tract and then threw it on the floor. He screamed at his mother, “Isn’t there a place a person can go where he won’t be hounded by religious fanatics?” With a tear in her eye the mother said, “Yes, son, there is a place you can go where you can get away from all that—IT IS CALLED **HELL**.” No one will ever hand you a tract in hell!
- **SOMEONE MIGHT SAY**:
“I am not afraid to die.” If you have never accepted Jesus as your Savior, you **should be afraid** to die. You may not be afraid to die, but that does not mean that you are not going to go to hell if you reject Jesus Christ as your Savior.
- **KEN FREEMAN** witnessed to his friend so many times that his friend said, “If you tell me I’m going to hell one more time, I’m going to kill you.” Ken said to his friend, “If you kill me, I’m going to heaven and you are still going to hell.”

WHEN JESUS SAID:

(V. 4), “. . . This sickness IS NOT UNTO **DEATH**, . . . ”

(V. 26), “And whosoever liveth and believeth in me **SHALL NEVER DIE..**”

HE WAS REFERRING TO **ETERNAL DEATH**. THE REASON Jesus could speak of Lazarus’ death in **a positive and an upbeat manner** was He knew that Lazarus’ death was **physical death only**. Lazarus had not died eternally.

S In light of eternity, the physical death of a believer is **not as big a deal** as we might be tempted to think of it. **ON THE OTHER HAND**, the death of an unsaved person is **much worse** than we are sometimes inclined to think of it.

S **A MAN** once said to a Christian, “If I believed half of what your Bible says about hell to be true, I would crawl across England on my knees with broken glass to help keep a person from going there.” **WELL**, it isn’t just half true, **IT IS ALL TRUE**.

I. JESUS' PROCLAMATION ABOUT DEATH

II. JESUS' PERSPECTIVE ON DEATH

(V. 15), “And I am **GLAD** for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe; . . .”

S Jesus used the word “**GLAD**” in reference to the disciples’ experience related to Lazarus’ death. “**GLAD**” is not a word that is often used in relationship with death. You **have probably never heard** a preacher say at a funeral, “We are *glad* that our friend is dead.” The reason Jesus spoke those words in relationship to Lazarus’ death was that HE HAD **HEAVEN’S PERSPECTIVE** on the death of a believer, and **Lazarus was** a believer.

S Death for the believer from a Biblical perspective IS THE SPIRITUAL EQUIVALENT OF “**SLEEP**.” Listen to Jesus’ use of the word “**SLEEP**” in relationship to death.

(V. 11-14), “. . . Our friend Lazarus **SLEEPETH**; but I go, that I may awake him out of **SLEEP**.¹² Then said his disciples, Lord, if he **SLEEP**, he shall do well.¹³ Howbeit Jesus spake of his death: but they thought that he had spoken of taking of rest in **SLEEP**.¹⁴ Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is **DEAD**.”

S JESUS **LIKENE**D the “**death**” of a believer to “**sleep**.” The Bible often uses the word “**SLEEP**” to refer to a believer’s death.

(1) Jesus said of **JAIRUS’ DAUGHTER**:

- **(Mk 5:39)**, “. . . The damsel is not dead, but **SLEEPETH**.”

(2) **STEPHEN’S** death is described using the following words:

- **(Ac 7:60)**, “And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he **FELL ASLEEP**.”

(3) The **COMING RESURRECTION OF THE SAINTS** is described using the word “sleep”:

- **(1 Co 15:51)**, “Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all **SLEEP**, but we shall all be changed,”

S The fact that a saint “**SLEEPS**” when he dies **DOES NOT MEAN** his spirit remains in his grave until the day of resurrection.

PAUL SAID:

- **(2 Co 5:8)**, “. . . **Absent** from the **body**, and to be **present** with the **Lord**.”

JESUS SAID TO THE THIEF on the cross who died beside Him:

- **(Lk 23:43)**, “. . . **Today** shalt thou be with me in **paradise**.”

When Jesus returns, He will bring His Saints with Him (1 Th 3:13; 4:14-15). The only way those Saints could come with Jesus would be for them to already be with Jesus when He returns. It is true Jesus will resurrect their dead bodies at that time.

S **THE POINT IS THIS**—Some of the things that are true about “sleep,” are also true about “death” as it relates to a believer. If we understand some of the truths about “sleep,” we can better understand some of the truths about “death.”

THREE TRUTHS ABOUT SLEEP:

#1. SLEEP IS HARMLESS, NOT DESTRUCTIVE

(V. 11), “. . . Our friend Lazarus **SLEEPETH**; . . .”

S It was true that Lazarus was “dead” (physically), but he **WASN’T REALLY DEAD** (spiritually). Consider a **silly**, and somewhat outlandish, illustration that makes an important point.

S **JUST SUPPOSE**, for a moment, that you had grown up on a **REMOTE ISLAND** among a tribe of people who had never personally experienced sleep. None of the people on that island, including yourself, had ever slept one wink in all their days. One day some explorers discover your island. Their first evening among you reveals something you have never

experienced before. Those newcomers begin to fall asleep. For the first time in your life you watch people close their eyes and go to sleep. You don't have a clue what is going on. It appears to you that they are all dying. To your amazement you discover some hours later that their sleep was totally **harmless** to them. They awaken from their sleep **unharmed**. Their sleep had not hurt them at all.

S Have you ever heard **the phrase, "WAKE UP IN HEAVEN"?**

From an eternal perspective, death for the believer is like *going to sleep* and then *waking up*. For the believer, death is **HARMLESS**. We die one moment, and awaken in heaven the next moment.

(1) **D.L. MOODY**

"Soon you will read in the newspaper that I am dead. Don't believe it for a moment. I will be more alive than ever before."
(Alcorn, pg. 64)

(2) **JOHN THORNTON** received word he had only a few days to live. He tells how he sat at his window and looked out at the **river** before him and the **mountains** beyond. He looked at the **stars** shining in the sky. Then he **wrote**: "I'm going to leave. But river, I'll be alive when every drop in you has dried up. Mountains, I'll be alive when you have disappeared. Stars, I'll be around when your light has burned out. For my spirit goes to God who gave it. I commit myself into the hands of the Father." (John M. Drescher, *Testimony of Triumph*, pg 94)

(3) **JAMES BOICE** shares the following in his commentary on John regarding **THE FUNERAL SERVICE** of **SIR WINSTON CHURCHILL**.

"At one point in the funeral service a bugler, stationed high in the dome of Saint Paul's Church in London, where the funeral took place, sounded **TAPS** while everyone waited in hushed silence. Taps signifies the end of the day in military circles. So this was a way of marking the end of Churchill's long and

distinguished life. To some extent it was the passing of an era. It was sad, even a bit mournful. But then—and this is the point for which I tell the story—no sooner had the notes of taps died away in the great cathedral than the bugle sound again. But this time the tune was not taps. The tune was **REVEILLE**, the call by which the military begins a new day. Churchill wished to give testimony to the truth that death is only a gateway into God's presence, into a life lived in His eternal day." (James Boice, *The Gospel of John*, pg 208)

SLEEP AND DEATH ARE BOTH:

#1. **HARMLESS** FOR THE BELIEVER

#2. SLEEP IS TEMPORARY, NOT PERMANENT

S PAUL COMPARED OUR BODIES TO A TENT. Then he compared our death to a tent that had fallen.

(2 Co 5:1), "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, **an house not made with hands**, eternal in the heavens."

S While at **BOY SCOUT CAMP** many years ago some scouts from a nearby hill snuck into our camp while we slept and pulled up the stakes that held our tent in place. Our tents fell in on top of us. Do you know what we did? We slept right through the night and awakened the next morning **rested** and **ready to go**. We did not even get up and fix our tents until the next morning. **The point is**—our fallen tent didn't hurt us at all.

S THE BIBLE **COMPARES** the death of our bodies to **TENT that has fallen**. Someday our tent will fall—we will die. Be it known that we will awaken from that death on the other side ready for all eternity.

S **RICHARD BAXTER** was a godly man and a great preacher. He had spent the last several years of his life in physical pain and agony. His pain was intensified by the fact that he had been

imprisoned for preaching the Gospel. A short while before his death a friend visited him. The friend pulled his chair up next to the bed of Richard and said to the preacher, "**Richard, how are you doing?**" And Richard replied, "**Friend, I am almost well.**" And he died. Think of that, "I am almost well", and then he died. (Paul Powell, *Death From the Other Side*, pg. 72)

S F. B. MEYER, while in his eighties, sat down and penned a letter to a friend. He wrote: "I have just heard to my surprise that I have only a few days to live. It may be before this reaches you, I shall have entered the palace. Don't trouble yourself to write. We shall meet in the morning.—With much love. —Yours affectionately." (John M. Drescher, *Testimony of Triumph*, pg 94)

(1 Co 15:54), “. . . This **mortal** shall have put on **immortality**, . . . ”

- #1. SLEEP IS **HARMLESS**, NOT DESTRUCTIVE
- #2. SLEEP IS **TEMPORARY**, NOT PERMANENT

#3. SLEEP IS “GAIN”, NOT LOSS

(Php 1:21), “For to me to live is Christ, and TO DIE IS **GAIN.**”

S When we have a good night’s sleep, we wake up **RESTED, REJUVENATED and REVITALIZED.** It is *gain*. We would all say that it was good to have slept.

S When **BILL WALLACE**, one of our Southern Baptist Missionaries to China, was killed in China, he was buried and the Chinese Christians placed the words of Phil 1:21 on the grave.

(Php 1:21), “For to me to live is Christ, and TO DIE IS **GAIN.**”

IN WHAT MANNER IS IT GAIN for a believer to die? Listen to Scripture and you will see.

- **(Rev 21:4)**, “And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be **no more death**, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.”
- **(1 Jn 3:2)**, “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, **WE SHALL BE LIKE HIM**; for we shall see him as he is.”
- **(1 Co 2:9)**, “. . . **Eye** hath not seen, nor **ear** heard, neither have entered into the **heart** of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.”

AN ELDERLY COUPLE died and went to heaven. The wife was so taken back by the beauty that she kept speaking of it again and again. The husband turned and looked at her and said, “Yes, and we could have been here long ago if you hadn’t fed us all those no cholesterol Bran Flakes.”

- **(Ps 116:15)**, “**PRECIOUS** in the sight of the LORD *is* the death of his saints.”

S “**PRECIOUS**” is not a word that is used very often in association with death. That is the word God used to describe the death of a believer.

- **ABRAHAM** died and God said, "PRECIOUS."
- **MOSES** died and God said, "PRECIOUS."
- **DAVID** died and God said, "PRECIOUS."
- **PAUL** died and God said, "PRECIOUS."
- **YOU** will die someday, and God will say, "PRECIOUS."

S AS A LITTLE KID, **DO YOU REMEMBER FALLING ASLEEP?** Sometimes you fell asleep right in the middle of a hard floor. Eight hours later you awakened to discover you had been carried to your soft bed. You did not even know when your dad had carried you to your bed. The whole process had been quite **painless**. It had also been very **profitable**. You awakened

all **refreshed** and ready to go again. **FROM THE PARENTS' PERSPECTIVE** watching the little child falling asleep on the floor and carrying him to his bed is **PRECIOUS**. So it is with death when we think of it from a heavenly perspective.

S JIM ELLIOT was one of five missionaries who were speared to death by **Auca** (now Waorani) people in **Ecuador**. Before his death he recorded these words:

"HE IS NO FOOL WHO GIVES WHAT HE CANNOT KEEP TO GAIN WHAT HE CANNOT LOSE."

I. JESUS' PROCLAMATION ABOUT DEATH

II. JESUS' PERSPECTIVE ON DEATH

- **HARMLESS**
- **TEMPORARY**
- **GAIN**

III. JESUS' POWER OVER DEATH

LET'S IMAGINE A **HIGH SPEED VIDEO CLIP** of the events that took place that day Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. Realize the events of that day were recorded for our benefit. In a very real sense, they are sort of a preview of what will someday happen to all of us who love the Lord Jesus.

(V. 32-44), "Then when **MARY** was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she **fell down at his feet**, saying unto him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. ³³ When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he **groaned** in the spirit, and was troubled, ³⁴ And said, **Where have ye laid him?** They said unto him, Lord, come and see. ³⁵ **Jesus wept.** ³⁶ Then said the Jews, Behold how he loved him! ³⁷ And some of them said, Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died? ³⁸ Jesus therefore again groaning in himself cometh to the grave. It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it. ³⁹ Jesus said, **Take ye away the stone.** **Martha**, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, Lord, by this time he **stinketh**: for he hath been *dead* **four days.** ⁴⁰ Jesus saith unto her, **Said I not unto thee**, that, if thou wouldst

believe, thou shouldst see the glory of God? ⁴¹ Then they took away the stone *from the place* where the dead was laid. And Jesus **lifted up his eyes**, and **said, Father, I thank thee** that thou hast heard me. ⁴² And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said *it*, that they may believe that thou hast sent me. ⁴³ And when he thus had spoken, **he cried with a loud voice, LAZARUS, COME FORTH.** ⁴⁴ And **HE THAT WAS DEAD CAME FORTH**, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go."

- **(V. 40)**, "Jesus saith unto her, **Said I not unto thee**, that, if thou wouldst believe, thou shouldst see the glory of God?"
- **(V. 26)**, "And whosoever liveth and believeth in me **SHALL NEVER DIE**. Believest thou this?"

S LAZARUS LOOKED DEAD, but he was **REALLY ALIVE**. A **SEED LOOKS DEAD, BUT REALITY IS THAT IT IS ALIVE**.

Suppose you held a simple **WHEAT SEED** in your hand. That seed was once a part of a green and growing plant. The seed itself was once soft and tender. One day that plant matured and died. That seed was harvested. You pick that seed up in your hand and **you are tempted to conclude** that the seed is dead because it is no longer attached to a green and growing wheat stalk. It is **BROWN, HARD** and **DRY**. Those who understand plant life know that just because a seed is detached from a plant **does not mean** it is **DEAD**. It is very much **ALIVE**. All one has to do to see that life in action is to plant that seed in the ground, water it, and watch a new green plant spring to life.

LISTEN TO JESUS:

(Jn 12:24), "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit."

S DOES THE SEED OF GOD'S "LIFE" dwell in you? The question is **not**, "Will you have eternal life someday when you die?" The question is, "Right now, does the seed of God's life dwell in you?" "Do you have eternal life?" The question is not, "Are you going to have God's life some day?" The question is, "DO YOU HAVE GOD'S LIFE RIGHT NOW?"

- **(John 3:36)**, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."
- **(1 John 5:13)**, "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God."

S IF YOU ARE NOT SURE, YOU CAN BE SURE. JESUS SAID:

- **(1 John 5:11)**, "And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son."
- **(Jn 1:12)**, "But as many as **received him**, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, *even* to them that believe on his name:"

WHEN **THE BODY OF A NONBELIEVER** is taken to the cemetery, not only is he physically dead, he is also eternally dead. That **does not mean** that he ceases to exist. It means he will exist in that place Jesus called **"OUTER DARKNESS."** It is that place called **HELL**. He is like that baked potato I showed you during the children's sermon. It looked like a living seed from outward appearance, but it had no life in it. You could cut it up and plant it as you would a living potato seed, but it would never grow. It is dead.

Do you have **"GOD'S LIFE"** in you through the person of the Lord Jesus Christ?

WE CLOSE WITH THE FOLLOWING STORY:

In his book, **"THE MORNING AFTER DEATH"**, L. D. JOHNSON retells a story of **JAMES GORDON GILKEY** concerning a **nineteenth-century Congregational minister** of New England by the name of **JOHN TODD**. This article was **TITLED: "GOD CAN BE TRUSTED."**

Orphaned at **age six**, **TODD** had been reared by an aunt. He became a minister and, while serving a congregation in Massachusetts, received a pitiful note from his now aged aunt. She stated she was in great distress because her doctor had informed her she had an incurable disease and death was imminent. She reached out to him for guidance and comfort.

John Todd responded promptly, "It is now 35 years since I, a little boy of six, was left quite alone in the world. You sent me word you would give me a home and be a kind of mother to me. I have never forgotten the day when I made the long journey of 10 miles from my home in Killingworth to your home in North Killingworth.

"I can still recall my disappointment when I learned that instead of coming for me yourself you had sent . . . Caesar to fetch me. I can still remember my tears and anxiety as, perched on your horse and clinging tight to Caesar, I started for my new home."

He then described his anxiety as a child when darkness fell before the journey was complete and how he wondered if his aunt had gone to bed before he arrived. Shortly thereafter, he wrote, they came to a clear area and he saw a friendly candle in the window and, reassuringly, his aunt was waiting for him at the door. He described her warm arms around him, lifting a tired and bewildered little boy down from the horse.

He remembered how she had given him supper beside the bright fire and then taken him to his room and sat beside him until he went to sleep.

"You are probably wondering why I am recalling all these things to your mind. Someday soon God will send for you, to take you to a new home. Don't fear the summons, the strange journey, the messenger of death. At the end of the road you will find love and a welcome; you will be safe in God's care and keeping. God can be trusted--trusted to be as kind as you were to me so many years ago."
"GOD CAN BE TRUSTED!" (Story taken years ago from the Texas Baptist Standard)

S "JUST THINK"

- "Of stepping on shore, and finding it heaven.
- Of taking hold of a hand, and finding it God's hand.
- Of breathing new air, and finding it celestial air.
- Of feeling invigorated, and finding it immortality.
- Of passing from storm and tempest, to an unbroken calm.
- Of waking up - and finding it HOME