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Series: *Holy Week 2020 – What Happens?*

Title: *What Happens When I Die?*

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Scripture: Job 14:14

We are victorious because HE IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN INDEED!!!! Let's pray together.

Father God,

Speak to us on this resurrection Sunday. Even though we are separated physically, unite us spiritually through the Spirit of Your Risen Son. Remind us of the implications for our lives today that come from what happened that first Easter morning. Open doors so that in coming days we can spread the eternity-changing news that Jesus is risen! In Jesus' name I pray. AMEN.

This Easter Sunday morning I want to begin by reading to you just one verse of Scripture, a verse in which Job posed a question that all people struggle with, especially during this pandemic. I'm referring to Job 14:14 where he asks: ***"If a man dies, will he live again?"***

Now, how would you answer that question? How would your neighbors or co-workers answer it? *"If COVID-19 or something else ends a person's existence, what happens next?"*

Before we get to the answer, I have to point out that the awareness of death is one thing that is unique about human beings. Unlike animals, we know our death is coming. We are conscious of our mortality. We know that as Hebrews 11:27 says, ***"It is appointed unto ALL men once to die."*** This is why everyone is so afraid of Covid-19, they fear they may be a part of the next body count statistic.

Well, in the pages of His book God has told us exactly what happens when we die. In fact, the Bible has a very detailed record of an Individual's actual encounter with death—including what happened to Him afterwards. By studying the experiences of this Individual, we can discover what happens to us when we death comes. As you have probably guessed, I am referring to Jesus, the Christ, Who died a cruel death on the cross and then rose and lives today!

In 1st Corinthians 15 verse 20, Paul refers to our Risen Lord in an interesting way. He writes, ***"Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the FIRST FRUITS of those who have fallen asleep."*** That phrase, ***"First fruit"*** means what happened to Jesus on that first Easter morning, is an example of what is to come for people who put their faith in Him. I mean, the reason Christians rejoice on this Easter Sunday is because we know that Jesus' resurrection is both proof and preview of our own!

Here's something else, the fact that God put a detailed description of Jesus' resurrection in His book, well, it shows that He WANTS us to know the answers to this question. He hasn't kept us in the dark in knowing what happens to us as believers when we die. Referring to the Easter story as recorded in Scripture, Max Lucado writes: *"If you'll celebrate a marriage anniversary alone this year, God speaks to you. If your child made it to Heaven before making it to kindergarten, He speaks to you. If you lost a loved one to violence—if you learned more than you want to know about disease—if your dreams were buried as they lowered the casket, God speaks to You. In His Book, He gives this confident word [in 1st Thessalonians 4:13-14] 'I want you to KNOW what happens to a Christian when he or she dies---so that when it happens you will not be full of sorrow as are those who have no hope.'"*

Okay, let's open God's book and see exactly WHAT God wants us to KNOW about death by looking at what happened to Jesus.

(1) The first thing that our Lord's experience with death shows us is that when we die—we get a new BODY.

And, I for one get more thankful for that every day. I look forward to getting a new body because in spite of the fact that this body of mine is still amazing and I say that in all humility—well, I have to tell you—it's not working as well as it once did. I've had to put it in the "shop" for repairs numerous times. At the next church-wide pool party I'll show you my scars.

These days I have to take medicine to control allergies, stress, blood pressure, thyroid and cholesterol. And, my energy level isn't what it used to be, my muscles strain easier and ache more. I have little bags over and UNDER my eyes, and a BIG bag under my chin. Plus, as you can see the "carpet" on the top of my head is--- well I was going to say "worn" but hey---it's completely thread-bare. Although, you may have noticed thanks to my barber being closed during this pandemic, I have had to start using a comb again on the sides! I'm thinking of growing a ponytail; e-mail me your thoughts on that. The point I'm making is, I am definitely getting close to the time when I'll need to trade this earth-suit in for a new model!

Well, Jesus' resurrection shows that since I have put my faith in Him, this is exactly what I will do when I die. The Bible says, and Jesus' death shows, that the moment my earth suit ceases to function I will leave this old broken-down body. In fact, the Bible tells us that is the DEFINITION of death. In James 2:26 we read, ***"...the body without the spirit is dead."***

And, that's what happened to Jesus. Do you remember the last words our Lord uttered before He died on Good Friday? He said, ***"Father into Your hands I commend My Spirit."*** (Luke 23:46) In the same way the hand animates a glove, the spirit energizes a body. When the spirit departs, the body—like a lifeless glove—is put aside. And please understand, this happens in an INSTANT. There is no halfway place, no intermediate state, no soul sleep. The Bible doesn't teach any of that stuff. No, the Bible tells us over and over again that the moment we die, we cast aside our earth suits and enter the glory of Heaven.

Here are a couple proof texts.

First, there's that verse I just quoted where Jesus said, ***"Into Thy hands I commend My Spirit"*** It's in present tense. Jesus said ***"I COMMEND---NOW"***---not later. And, do you remember Jesus' promise to the repentant thief on the cross next to Him? He said, ***"This day—TODAY—you're going to be WITH Me in paradise."*** (Luke 23:43) So, the Bible clearly teaches that when we die, we don't cease existing even for a moment. There's no lapse in consciousness. Our Spirit separates from our body at death and we go immediately to be with God. As it says in 2nd Corinthians 5:8, ***"To be absent from the body is to be at home with the Lord."***

I love the epitaph on the tombstone of a man named Peas. Here's what it says: ***"Here lies the body of Old Man Peas Beneath the daisies and the trees. But Peas ain't here, only the pod. Peas shelled out and went home to God."*** Well, the thrilling truth is that when we shell out of THIS pod—we are given a NEW pod—a new body. As Paul says in Philippians 3:21, ***"He will change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body."*** So, our new bodies will be like Jesus' new body, an amazing body that people saw Him use during the 40 days before His ascension. Let's review their eye-witness accounts.

First, Jesus' new body was similar to the way it was prior to His death. He LOOKED the same. Remember? He showed the disciples the nail scars in his hands and feet.

- Jesus' new body was recognizable. Jesus was identified some 11 times after His death.
- And Jesus' new body was touchable. It was solid—real—flesh and bones.

Remember when Mary Magdalene recognized Him in the garden that first Easter morning? She held on to Him so tightly that Jesus had to comfort her and in essence say, ***“You can let go of Me Mary—I have not YET ascended to My Father!”***

- The resurrected Jesus ate food.

Do you remember the fish He requested and the breakfast He made for His disciples by the Sea of Galilee the day He forgave Peter?

So, His new body was similar to the old one, but at the same time His body was DIFFERENT.

- He could walk through walls.

Remember when the disciples were huddled behind closed doors and Jesus suddenly appeared in their midst?

- He could also travel great distances instantly.
- Before His death on the cross He got tired and weary but not after.
- And, He apparently could fly—remember—He ASCENDED to Heaven.

Now, wouldn't you like to have a body like that? You will---but that's not all! You'll never need doctors or medicines because your new body will never get sick. You will be eternally YOUNG. Aging will never be an issue. There is not AARP in Heaven!

My dad died nearly 18 years ago and for several months after he passed I dreamed about him. Sometimes I could even smell his Old Spice aftershave lotion. And I've never experienced SMELL in a dream at any other time. In those dreams, dad wasn't old and weak, suffering from congestive heart failure. No, he was YOUNG and strong and energetic. And he had a full head of hair! Now many people would say my dreams were just a side-effect of my grief, but I don't think that. No, I believe God allowed my dad to come to me in that way to reassure me that he was better than he had ever been because he was enjoying his NEW body.

Listen to how Paul describes our new bodies in 1st Corinthians 15:42-44, ***“In the same way, our earthly bodies which die and decay are different from the bodies we shall have when we come back to life again, for they will never die. The bodies we have now embarrass us, for they become sick and die; but they will be full of glory when we come back to life again. Yes, they are weak, dying bodies now, but when we live again they will be full of strength.”***

Joni Eareckson Tada became a quadriplegic as a teenager in a diving accident. Since then she has been in a wheelchair—dependent on others for her care 24 hours a day. She writes, *“Somewhere in my broken, paralyzed body, is the seed of what I shall become. The paralysis makes what I am to become all the more grand when you contrast atrophied, useless legs against splendorous resurrected legs. I'm convinced that if there are mirrors in heaven (and why not?), the image I'll see will be unmistakably 'Joni,' although a much better, brighter Joni.*

So much so, that it's not worth comparing. I will bear the likeness of Jesus, the Man from Heaven.”

So, the record of Jesus' resurrection shows us that when we die we will be given NEW bodies. But that's not all.

(2) You will also get a new YOU.

You'll still be you—but FAR BETTER! As Lucado puts it in his book, *When Jesus Comes*, *“you will be at your best forever. I know that you have your good moments now---occasional glimpses of your heavenly self, like when you change your baby's diaper without having to be asked---or when you forgive your boss's temper, or tolerate your spouse's moodiness—in these times you display traces of saintliness. It's the OTHER moments that sour life. And you ALL know what I'm talking about—those times when you use your tongue to cut people*

to pieces behind their backs---those days when you lose your temper and say things you wish you hadn't—or when you selfishly take time for yourself when you should have spent it with the kids. Well, when you die all that bad will be no more as God instantly completes the good work He began in you that moment you put your faith in His Son. When you die, you will be perfected—glorified—and will indeed be at your best from then on—throughout all eternity.”

And if that's not good enough remember, in Heaven everyone else will be at their best as well! There will be no more rivalries or jealousy. There'll be no such thing as false modesty. There will be no HARD feelings or HURT feelings, no misunderstandings, no critical spirits, no prejudice, no cliques! Lucado writes, *“Jesus will suction the last drop of orneriness from the most remote corners of our souls.”*

Well, with all these NEW YOU'S walking around, can you imagine the dramatic reunions we'll witness?

- A soldier embracing the sniper who killed him.
- A daughter seeing her abusive but repentant father and holding him.
- A son encountering the mother who aborted him.
- Siblings who haven't spoken for years enjoying each other's company.

As we stand in God's Holy presence in our Heavenly Home with healed and whole spirits there will be a lot of reconciliations like that.

And, a lot of reunions as well! I can't wait to be with my parents and in-laws, my grandparents, and the seemingly endless list of dear friends I have buried over the years.

We'll laugh as I ask them, *“How'd you like your funeral?”* It will be WONDERFUL to get back all those people I have lost to death. You see, one of the bad things about death is the fact that we feel robbed. We feel this way because death TAKES—it takes moments and memories not yet shared: birthdays, vacations, kid's weddings, grand-kid's graduations. When death comes “normal” is no more and never will be again. This is a picture of C. S. Lewis and his wife. After she died of cancer, he wrote, *“Her absence is like the sky, spread over everything.”* Death is like that for those of us left behind. It's a cloud that darkens everything as we realize that our lives will never be the same again. Well, in our new Home we'll get back all that has been taken from us as we are reunited with our loved ones and friends—never again to be parted from them.

Now, so far, as you may have noted, we have answered the question, “What happens when I die?” from the CHRISTIAN perspective.

What about everyone else? What happens when THEY die? Well, there are some similarities. When non-Christians die, they also experience a separation of the spirit from the body. They too will continue to exist for their souls are eternal as well. But Scripture warns that people who have rejected Christ will not spend eternity in Heaven. No—their new home will be a horrible place called Hell and it is a place that is everything that Heaven is not. It is a place of the constant torment of fear and loneliness because Hell is a place without GOD's loving presence. 2nd Thessalonians 1:9 says, ***“They will be punished in everlasting Hell, forever separated from the Lord, never to see the glory of His power.”***

Statisticians tell us that 60 million people die every year. That's 150,000 people entering eternity every day, 100 every minute, so since this service began 2,500 people have discovered what happens when we die. I wonder how many of them knew Jesus and therefore were ready for death? Dr. L. Nelson Bell once said, *“Only those who are prepared to die are really prepared to live.”* Well are you ready? Listen. The glorious news of Easter is this. If you are not ready—if you are NOT prepared for what will happen when you die, you can be!

And more than anything God wants you to be ready. He loves you so much that He doesn't want you to experience the Hell of eternal separation from Him. In fact, what happened on Good Friday proves that God would literally rather die than live throughout eternity apart from you. All you have to do is put your trust in Jesus, the Savior God provided. Admit your sin to Him, ask for His forgiveness and give Him your life. If you have questions about this decision contact me.

Let's close by singing:

Because He lives! I can face tomorrow! Because He lives! All fear is gone!

Because I know He holds the future and life is worth the living Just because He lives!

He is risen!

He is risen indeed!