

XLVII. Timeless Truth for Timely Topics in Biblical Perspective  
*What Does the Bible Say?*

“What Happens When I Die—The Intermediate State (Part 2)”

II Corinthians 5:8

Dr. Harry L. Reeder III

September 18, 2016 – Evening sermon

We will be looking at a number of passages of Scripture in this study in our second study of what happens when we die. In this study we will be looking at the very next moment after we die. Before we get into the study I want to recommend to you two books that will help you in your further study of this matter of what happens to a believer when they die. The 101 book on this matter is titled Fear Not written by Ligon Duncan and the 201 book on this subject is titled What Happens After I Die written by Michael Rogers who is a PCA pastor in Pennsylvania. I served with him on the board at Westminster Seminary and I highly commend this book to you for a deeper study than what we can do here in a few studies. Now let's get started by looking in Hebrews 12.

Hebrews 12:21–24 says [21] *Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, “I tremble with fear.”* [22] *But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering,* [23] *and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect,* [24] *and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.*

One of the reasons I'm doing this study is because God blessing this church for 60 years and that means we have some founding members that are a little bit closer to glory than we were when we started out. You do not know your time, when it's your time to go but I want you to know that the best is yet to come, if you're a believer. There was a lady who told her pastor that when she died she wanted him to make sure her casket was in the front of the church with the lid open and not closed like they did with everyone else. She wanted him to march everyone in front of it so they could see that she would be holding a Bible in one hand and a fork in the other hand. He wanted to know why. She told him she was setting up her funeral sermon for him so that when they saw the Bible in her one hand he would tell them that the Bible had been the foundation of her life – that through the Word of God I have known the God of the Word and that He had never forsaken her. The pastor understood that one.

It was the fork in her hand that he didn't understand. She told him that when people go to dinners and the hostess comes by to clean up the dishes after you have eaten this wonderful sumptuous meal, she says to you 'keep your fork.' When the hostess says that to you then you know something and that is that the best is yet to come. It's called dessert. So the lady told the pastor to tell them that as much as she has known and loved Jesus here on this earth, don't shed any tears for me because I've gone to where the best is yet to come for me. I don't know a single person who knows Jesus as their Lord and Savior, who would deny that.

We believe that but we have a very difficult time operationally believing that. We verbally confess that. I believe in our hearts that we believe that but because of the pull of the material, of this world, of the good experiences God has given us in a fallen world, it is very difficult for us to believe that one minute after I die it will be better with no comparison to what I have had here on this earth. So I am going to use this study and the next study to try to convince you of that from the Scriptures. I'm not going to do this from anecdotes, movies or books. Men

and women who were dead and came back in the Bible never wrote any books and I think it was because they were mad they were brought back. They looked at it as a demotion and not a promotion. Perhaps that was why they didn't write books about it.

That moment we take our last breath here we are absent from the body and present with the Lord and there is no comparison. That is not to demean anything here. It is merely to speak of the majesty of what is there. So let's work through this. Let's look now at Philippians 1. Let's look at what Paul says on this matter.

Philippians 1:21 says [21] *For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.* To die is, the best is yet to come. To die, is not demotion. Now look how Paul explains it. Philippians 1:22–26 says [22] *If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell.* [23] *I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.* [24] *But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.* [25] *Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith,* [26] *so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.* This is real life for the Apostle Paul.

Here Paul is in prison and all the Emperor has to do is nod his head and Paul's done for. There are people clamoring for his life. Here Paul is possibly under a death sentence and he wants us to understand that his life here on earth is Christ's and that means when he dies that is gain. So does he pray to be delivered from that death sentence or does he pray to be delivered to Jesus through that death sentence? His desire is to go ahead and be put to death to go ahead and be with Jesus but if God doesn't take me home he knows he is to be fruitful labor for the Philippians. He senses that God has more work for him to do before He takes him home. His desire is to depart because it is far better – to live is fruitful labor for Christ, to die is gain.

So in what sense is it better when we leave here to go to be with the Lord? We have historically called this the intermediate state. Your first state when you're born is that you are dead in your sins. Your grace estate is that you are converted and been born again. You now belong to Jesus Christ and you are in His Kingdom. When you die you go to an intermediate state and the reason it is called that is because it is not the final state. The final state or the ultimate state is when Jesus comes back, there is a resurrection of the body and there is a new heavens and a new earth. I will cover that state in the next two studies.

I like what Michael Rogers says about the intermediate state in his book What Happens When I Die. While he understands why it is used because it is an intermediate status between our death and the coming of Christ, but when you die there is an immediate state of heaven or hell – the temporary heaven and the temporary hell. For the unbeliever when they die there is the temporary hell immediately after they die. For the believer when they die there is the temporary heaven immediately after they die.

What does the immediate/intermediate state look like and why for the believer is it so much better than our present state? We don't have all the facts on this but the Bible has revealed all that we need to know. Why is I Corinthians 13 so famous for us? It is the love chapter but it's interesting to note that toward the end of that chapter it says in I Corinthians 13:12, [12] *For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.* We can see what is going to come but we're still looking through like a smoky glass. We can't see everything yet but we can see enough of what we need to know and what God wants us to know. When we get there then we'll see clearly.

What is it that we now see that we'll see better when we go to be with Him or when He comes for us? Let's look at Hebrews 12 because this explains what happens to believers who die

prior to the coming of Christ. There are some key phrases here that we need to understand. Hebrews 12:22–23 says [22] *But you* (talking of those who died in Hebrews 11) *have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, [23] and to the assembly of the firstborn* (Jesus is the first born from the dead and all who are in Christ are joint heirs with Him – sons of God and firstborn) *who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect*, (when you get to this intermediate state you will meet the disembodied saints, the spirits of them who have gone before you who were in Christ and are now in His presence).

When Jesus comes back there will be a resurrection of the body and for those disembodied spirits there will be a new body for that new heavens and new earth. In the intermediate state there is an immediate heaven, heavenly Jerusalem, a Mount Zion, that you come to and when you get there you will be what they are and that is a disembodied spirit *made perfect*, as the text says in Hebrews 12. In other words, the essence of you will be there. Your spirit or your soul will be there and you will be made perfect. That is what makes you, you, your soul or your spirit.

Let me try and explain this. I know some of you are exposed to teaching that says man is made up of three parts – body, soul and spirit. I don't believe that is Biblical. I believe that spiritual being has multiple titles. Sometimes your spiritual being is called a heart, a mind, a soul or a spirit in terms of its multi-faceted dynamics. So I'm not a trichotomist but I'm a dichotomist. I believe we're made with a body and a soul which is sometimes called a spirit, a mind or a heart. In other words, even if you disagree with me we can agree here that we are physical and we're spiritual. What makes you, you is not your body. You can be you without your body. You can't be you without your soul.

In creation God made Adam from the dust of the ground. One of my favorite stories from this was the little boy who looked under his bed and saw the clump of dust and then said to his mother, 'Mom, did God make the first man from dust?' His mother said 'Yes.' He said 'When we die do we return to dust?' She said 'Yes.' He said 'Mom, look under the bed because we have someone either coming or going underneath there.' So in death that is why the body is returning to the dust of the ground because of the curse of sin.

When God made Adam from the dust of the ground we don't have Adam yet. Adam doesn't come into being until God breathes into him. Genesis 2:7 says [7] *then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature*. Adam became a living soul when God breathed into him, life. That is what made Adam, Adam, a living soul.

In the last study we learned there are two things about death that we have been inundated with that we have to say 'no' to. One is we have been inundated with an atheistic Darwinian view that says death is part of the cycle of life. Death is not part of the cycle of life in Genesis 1 and 2 because death is not natural. Death is an enemy. Death doesn't come until sin enters the world in Genesis 3.

The second thing we told and taught is this Greek concept of life where the physical is bad and the spiritual is good. The physical is your body and the soul is like a passenger in a car, then death gets to open the door to let out the passenger. That is why the Eastern religions then cremate the body because they don't want that soul to go back into that body. That is platonic where the lower story of life is the physical and the upper story is the spiritual therefore the spiritual is good and the physical is bad.

When God made the physical He said it was good. When He made the spiritual it was good and sin brings the curse on both. Redemption deals with both so that you are born again spiritually and one day you'll have a resurrected body to be joined with your spirit and soul. So we need to understand we are a soul and body and not so much being a perforated death where you can tear it apart but the soul and body are like two threads woven together in one cloth. What makes that body a non-corpse is the soul that is you made in the image of God. Your body came in the image of your parents but God made you as you by giving you that soul where that soul makes you a living soul. So when you take away the body you are still there.

That doesn't mean that God doesn't have a plan for that body. In our Apostle's Creed we say 'I believe in the resurrection of the body' and we will get that in two studies from now. That which is essentially you is that which is your soul or your spirit. This is why God says in Matthew 10:28, [28] *And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.* God is who you fear because those who can kill the body cannot kill you. Only God has authority over the body and the soul. They can destroy your body but they cannot destroy your life. That is what makes you, you.

So when you die the body goes to the grave to become dust from which God is going to raise it at the second coming of Christ. Until then you are absent from the body and now present with the Lord and I want to walk you through three passages of Scripture that will give us some clarity on this. Let's start by looking at I Corinthians 15.

I Corinthians 15:50–55 says [50] *I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.* [51] *Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep* (a euphemism for the death of a believer but there will be some believers alive when we come back), *but we shall all be changed,* [52] *in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.* [53] *For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.* [54] *When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory."*

[55] *"O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"*

My illustration on sleep as the euphemism for the death of the believer is it is 10:45pm on a Friday night and at 11:15pm is the Late Show in Charlotte, North Carolina in 1959. I would talk my dad and mom into letting me stay up to see it on Friday nights. I would stay up to watch it and by about 11:30pm on that night I was already asleep. I never woke up one time in front of the television the next morning. My father would come after I had fallen asleep and put me where I belonged and that is the picture Paul is given here in I Corinthians 15. Believers do not go through the horrors of Thanatos separation. They go through the valley of the shadow of death. So if a truck pulls up beside you on the street and the shadow falls over your car, are you okay? Yes. If it runs over you will you be okay? Yes. Think of death as the truck. For the unbeliever the truck hits them. O horrors of death apart from Christ but for the believer death is the shadow that Jesus has already met and defeated for you and that's why Paul changes the term to sleep.

The point of this passage is that when you die you are with the Lord. When Jesus comes back your body will be raised imperishable and the bodies of those who are living are going to be changed because these bodies are not fit for the new heavens and the new earth with their brokenness of sin. That which is temporal will put on the eternal which is set for the new heavens and the new earth. Therefore there will be the resurrection of the body for those living

will have their bodies transformed at that time. Those who died before His coming are with the Lord in their disembodied spirits which are made perfect in His presence, even prior to His coming again. Now let's look at I Thessalonians 4. This has to do with Paul answering their question about what happened to those who died before the Lord came back.

I Thessalonians 4:13–18 says [13] *But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. [14] For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. [15] For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. [16] For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. [17] Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. [18] Therefore encourage one another with these words.*

Here they are wondering if Jesus comes back and if they are better off than those who have already died and the answer is 'no.' They are better than those still alive on earth because those who have died are already with Him in their embodied spirit. They have preceded you and when He comes they will come back with Him. When that trumpet sounds what will happen next are those graves will open up and their bodies will be raised transformed to Him. You will be raised up, transformed to be joined with Him as well. Then we will be deposited into a new heavens and a new earth with a new body for all eternity. So where are they now? Let's look at Revelation 6. I'll give you what the text says. There are many other texts we could look at but I'm just being selective here.

Revelation 6:9–11 says [9] *When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain (the martyrs) for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. [10] They cried out with a loud voice, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" [11] Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.*

What did he see under the altar? He didn't see their bodies for some of them had been burned. He sees their souls, again the spirits who are made perfect. So it wasn't their time to come with Him yet and more were going to join them but they were given a white robe until then. The number of those who had been martyred for the faith hasn't been filled up yet. I want you to see that for those who have died their soul or spirit is with Him, made perfect, according to this text. This is one category of believers who have died and are with the Lord. You can see they are cognizant, rational and they are making a prayer request, calling on the Lord in praise and petition in His presence. You can see the essence of their existence is there made in the image of God. Now let's look at II Corinthians 5 which is where we started off in the last study and we'll finish up in this study.

From this text I will give you five key words about our intermediate state which is our immediate heaven or those who are unbelievers, an immediate hell, not the final heaven or the final hell but a true heaven and a true hell. II Corinthians 5:1–10 says [1] *For we **know** that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. [2] For in this **tent** we **groan, longing** to put on our heavenly dwelling, [3] if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. [4] For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be*

*further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. [5] He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.*

*[6] So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, [7] for we walk by faith, not by sight. [8] Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. [9] So whether we are at **home** or away, we make it our aim to please him. [10] For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.*

The first word is 'know' from verse 1 and this is something that ought to penetrate your world and life view. So how do we view this body? The second word is 'tent' from verse 2. Our body is a tent. What is Jesus preparing for you? He is preparing a mansion for you but this body under the curse of sin is a tent and a tent is temporary. It does not compare to the building that God is building for you. This tent is an earthly home to be destroyed, will be returned to dust and refabricated into a building of God and now you have something permanent. Now God is fitting for you a body for all eternity.

What is happening to us now? The third word is 'groan' also in verse 2. We groan and that is the language of a woman giving birth – groaning in child birth. Those who are near my age or who have surpassed my age I can almost hear you groaning when I see you. The older you get the more you are groaning. We are groaning to be delivered from this tent. Romans 8 says that the whole creation is groaning to be delivered from the curse of sin into a new heavens and a new earth, so it's not just us. So we're like the woman groaning to give birth and the joy that's coming to bring it forth.

So why are we groaning? The fourth word is 'longing' in verse 2. We are longing to for the perfected body, with the perfected soul that is shaped for all eternity and not the temporary, sin-cursed body. In between the setting aside of this tent and the other one, we are without the clothing that God will give to us and we want the clothing, that new body in the new heavens and the new earth. Step one is this body destroyed. Step two is to go to be present with the Lord and the perfecting of our souls. Step three Jesus comes again. Step four this body is then raised imperishable for the new heavens and the new earth. How do we know we'll get this new body? It is because He has given us His Holy Spirit as the guarantee as it states in verse 5. The Holy Spirit is the guarantee of the blessings to come.

The fifth word is 'home.' We are not home. While you are here home in this tent, you're not home. Home is the body He has prepared in the new heavens and the new earth. When a believer dies we all say 'they are home and we're not' but we have a hard time embracing that because we all think we're in the land of the living and the believer who died went to the land of the dying. Actually we are in the land of the dying and the believer who has died is in the land of the living. D.L. Moody said "the day they read my obituary they will say I'm dead but don't believe a word of it for on that day I will never be more alive than on that day." But you have to walk by faith.

You have to walk by faith which comes by hearing the Word to develop a Christian world and life view. Then you walk with courage whether at home in the body or with the Lord. You then begin to see things differently. Now God does a lot of things to get us ready. I love all of you but increasingly the longer I live I have more people there that I want to see than I have here that I want to see. I want to see my parents, my grandparents and some of my spiritual mentors who have gone to be with the Lord. When I get there I also want to talk to Paul and Lot to ask him 'how could you be righteous and go live in that city?' I want to ask Lazarus what he

felt like when he walked out of that grave. I have all kinds of questions I want to ask all kinds of people but what makes heaven, heaven for me – is absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. I want to see Jesus and I will and absolutely nothing will compare with that.

I hope you have some clearer understanding on this. The immediate heaven is called Abraham's bosom or paradise. Remember the thief on the cross? "Today (immediately) you will be with Me in paradise." Remember the rich man? He was in torment, in the immediate hell but not the final hell. In the next study you will understand why you will never ask me again why we say in the Apostle's Creed that He ascended into hell. I will explain it to you. It has to do with the intermediate state and the anticipation of the final state. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together and walk through this Your Word. We are grateful to know that when we die this body of necessity will be laid aside but we live because we'll be with the Lord. We will see Him and be present with Him. We will be aware. We will be conscience. We will be praising and petitioning. We will be learning in the presence of our Lord with one another. Father, I anticipate with great joy that final state when it comes and we have not a temporary, immediate heaven but the everlasting new heavens and new earth. I pray Father, that You will receive all the glory as we continue to try to understand what it will be like and what we will have in Christ but Father, it's enough that we have Christ for I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Power Point

LIFE TAKEAWAY

Westminster Shorter Catechism Question 37

*Q. What benefits do believers receive from Christ at death?*

- A. The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory; and their bodies, being still united to Christ, do rest in their graves till the resurrection.

Westminster Confession Chapter. 32:1

Of the State of Men after Death, and of the Resurrection of the Dead

The bodies of men, after death, return to dust, and see corruption: but their souls, which neither die nor sleep, having an immortal subsistence, immediately return to God who gave them: the souls of the righteous, being then made perfect in holiness, are received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God, in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies. And the souls of the wicked are cast into hell, where they remain in torments and utter darkness, reserved to the judgment of the great day. Besides these two places, for souls separated from their bodies, the Scripture acknowledgeth none.