

Sermon Series: Questions that I would like to ask God—Lord of Life Lutheran Church—11/26/00

Title: What happens when I die?

Text: Luke 16: 19-31 & Hebrews 9: 27-28

Introduction: **Illus. 555-HEAVEN**

Theme: Because none of us has been through death, dying is one of the most feared and mythologized events of our life—yet God tells us a lot about dying and in Jesus and because of him takes the fear out of death for us.

So why do we have to die?

- The reality of our fallen human nature (*The wages of sin is death. Romans 6: 23*)
 1. **ILLUS.: REALITY CHECK IN THE MIRROR**
- We can't cheat death
 1. **ILLUS.: RECENT MOVIE THAT THE BOYS RENTED**
 2. *"It is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment." Hebrews 9: 27*
 3. *"There was a rich man who wore expensive clothes. Every day was like a party to him. There was also a beggar named Lazarus who was regularly brought to the gate of the rich man's house. Lazarus would have eaten any scraps that fell from the rich man's table. Lazarus was covered with sores, and dogs would lick them. One day the beggar died, and the angels carried him to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. Lk16: 19-22*
 4. Not surprised when young die, when terminal illness overwhelms us, when sudden tragedy sweeps life away.
- How will you respond when death comes knocking?
 1. **ILLUS.: THE FATHER AT THE CROSS**
 2. Do not mourn as the world does
 3. Live as more than conquerors
 4. Live in death shadow valley as if the resurrection dawn is just about to break

Heavenly confident or `scared as hell'

- What the Bible teaches about eternity after our time ends
 1. There is a hell and heaven as the eternal reward/consequence for faith or lack of faith
 - *"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life—do not be amazed at this for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned." John 5: 24-29*
 2. Our judgment day will happen at the moment of death or at the final resurrection, whichever comes first.
 - **PRINT AND READ LUKE 16: 23 & Hebrews 9: 27**
 3. Hell a `real'
 - **ILLUS.: RECENT OPINION POLL**
 - A place of active punishment for unbelief *"The rich man went to hell, where he was constantly tortured." vs. 23*
 - A place absent of God and his daily mercy *"Have mercy on me." vs. 24*
 - A place of sever physical pain *"Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water to cool off my tongue." vs. 23b*
 - A place of no second chances *"A wide chasm separates us. People couldn't cross it in either direction even if they wanted to." vs. 26*—no purgatory, no second chances to make up for the past
 4. Heaven is as real and certain for believers in Jesus
 - A place gifted by grace and not earned or lost by what we do or don't do *"Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin." Hebrews 9: 28*
 - A place of fellowship with God and others *"Lazarus died, and angels carried him to be with Abraham." vs. 22*
 - A place of deliverance from suffering *"Lazarus' life was filled with misery. Now he has peace here." vs. 25*
 - No reincarnation necessary *"Send Lazarus back...they have Moses and Prophets....listen to them." vs. 27,28*

• **Live as if you are going to die but act as if that is when you really start living**

1. **ILLUS.: READING YOUR OWN OBITUARY**
2. Witness to your friends and family, today, as if it really matters
 - *"The rich man replied, 'No, Father Abraham! If someone comes back to them from the dead, they will turn to God and change the way they think and act.' "Abraham answered him, 'If they won't listen to Moses' Teachings and the Prophets, they won't be persuaded even if someone comes back to life.' " Luke 19: 30-31*
3. Anticipate your death as a time of great gain *"eagerly await meeting Jesus." Heb. 9:28*
 - *"For me to live is Christ and to die is gain." Philippians 1: 21*
 - **ILLUS.: IN THE GRIP OF GRACE**

555-HEAVEN

I was phoning my parents near St. Peter, Minnesota, from New Jersey in the days when telephone operators still put through calls. When we were disconnected mid-conversation, I asked the New Jersey operator to please place the call again. The New Jersey operator asked the Minnesota operator, "Who am I connected to?" "St. Peter," came the reply. I nearly laughed out loud when I heard the New Jersey operator exclaim, "Heavens, I don't want him yet even if this is my last night of work!"

THE FATHER AT THE CROSS

Last week my son, Bjorn, got sick. I took his temperature, and it was 102.5. The Children's Advil came out. He slugged down the appropriate dose for his size. Forty-five minutes later the fever was back down to 100. Just before bed, I checked his temperature again. It was back up. More Advil. I checked again 45 minutes later; now it was 103. Concerned, I asked Bjorn to drink more water. He obliged, but he was clearly languishing. My wife, Mary, slept with our youngest son, Kristian. I slept alone in our bedroom and monitored Bjorn through the night. At 12:30 A.M. the thermometer was shaken down and placed under the tongue of my lethargic son. His skin was hot. His affect dulled. 104. I called the urgent care facility at the local medical center. They said, "Bring him in as soon as possible." Mary took Bjorn in while I stayed home with Kristian. While she started the van, I got Bjorn ready. I jostled him. He awoke. I told him we were going to the doctor. He looked at me with weary, wondering eyes and said, "Am I going to die, Daddy?" Immediately, I had three reactions. Common sense: "No, you are not going to die. We need to get this fever down." Emotional: "I'm scared." Visions of children with bizarre diseases flooded my heart. Spiritual: "Dear Jesus, Cover him. Heal him. Love him." I conveyed the common sense reaction to Bjorn, not wanting to scare him, and I was fairly certain his fever was not life threatening. But my mind flashed to the many parents in this world who have had to look at their children, knowing that the ultimate answer to that question was "Yes." I can barely write as I contemplate that circumstance. And I wonder if in the heavenly places there was once a conversation between the Father and the Son, when the Son asked the question, "Am I going to die, Daddy?" and in his heart the Father knew the answer was "Yes." Per Nilsen, Burnsville, Minnesota

IS HELL REAL?

It seems that hell isn't as hot as it used to be. Since the days of fiery sermons from Puritan preachers like Jonathan Edwards, hell has become "more of a deep funk than a pit of fire." A recent *U.S. News & World Report* poll reveals that 64 percent of Americans believe there is a hell, 25 percent say there isn't a hell, and 9 percent don't know. Most respondents think of hell as "an anguished state of existence" or "an unpleasant solitary confinement" rather than as a real place.

READING YOUR OBITUARY

In literature the story is told of a man who opens a newspaper and discovers the date on the newspaper is six months in advance of the time he lives. He begins to read through the newspaper, and he discovers stories about events that have not yet taken place. He turns to the sports page, and there are scores of games not yet played. He turns to the financial page and discovers a report of the rise or fall of different stocks and bonds. He realizes this can make him a wealthy man. A few large bets on an underdog team he knows will win will make him wealthy. Investments in stocks that are now low but will get high can fatten his portfolio. He is delighted. He turns the page and comes to the obituary column and sees his picture and story. Everything changes. The knowledge of his death changes his view about his wealth.

IN THE GRIP OF GRACE

On August 16, 1987, Northwest Airlines flight 225 crashed just after taking off from the Detroit airport, killing 155 people. One survived: a four-year-old from Tempe, Arizona, named Cecelia. News accounts say when rescuers found Cecelia they did not believe she had been on the plane. Investigators first assumed Cecelia had been a passenger in one of the cars on the highway onto which the airliner crashed. But when the passenger register for the flight was checked, there was Cecelia's name. Cecelia survived because, even as the plane was falling, Cecelia's mother, Paula Chican, unbuckled her own seat belt, got down on her knees in front of her daughter, wrapped her arms and body around Cecelia, and then would not let her go. Nothing could separate that child from her parent's love—neither tragedy nor disaster, neither the fall nor the flames that followed, neither height nor depth, neither life nor death. Such is the love of our Savior for us. He left heaven, lowered himself to us, and covered us with the sacrifice of his own body

Luke 16:19-31

"There was a rich man who wore expensive clothes. Every day was like a party to him. ²⁰There was also a beggar named Lazarus who was regularly brought to the gate of the rich man's house. ²¹Lazarus would have eaten any scraps that fell from the rich man's table. Lazarus was covered with sores, and dogs would lick them. ²²"One day the beggar died, and the angels carried him to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³He went to hell, where he was constantly tortured. As he looked up, in the distance he saw Abraham and Lazarus. ²⁴He yelled, 'Father Abraham! Have mercy on me! Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water to cool off my tongue. I am suffering in this fire.' ²⁵Abraham replied, 'Remember, my child, that you had a life filled with good times, while Lazarus' life was filled with misery. Now he has peace here, while you suffer. ²⁶Besides, a wide chasm separates us. People couldn't cross it in either direction even if they wanted to.' ²⁷"The rich man responded, 'Then I ask you, Father, to send Lazarus back to my father's home. ²⁸I have five brothers. He can warn them so that they won't end up in this place of torture.' ²⁹Abraham replied, 'They have Moses' Teachings and the Prophets. Your brothers should listen to them!' ³⁰"The rich man replied, 'No, Father Abraham! If someone comes back to them from the dead, they will turn to God and change the way they think and act.' ³¹"Abraham answered him, 'If they won't listen to Moses' Teachings and the Prophets, they won't be persuaded even if someone comes back to life.' " (GW) **Hebrews 9:27-28**

And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this *comes* judgment, ²⁸so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time for salvation without *reference to sin*, to those who eagerly await Him. (NASV)