

Is There a Life After Death?

by Bishop M.A. Lalachan

The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding death and the assurance of life after death through faith in Jesus Christ and the power of His resurrection.

Scripture: Psalm 118:24, John 11:25, Romans 5:12, 1 Corinthians 15:20, Hebrews 13:5

Topics: "Eternal Life", "Resurrection Hope"

Description

Bishop M.A. Lalachan preaches about the significance of the resurrection as the assurance of Christ's eternal presence with us, emphasizing the transformative impact of Good Friday and Easter on the world. He challenges the audience to confront the reality of death and the questions surrounding life after death, urging them not to wait until the end to seek answers. Through the tragic story of the Titanic, he illustrates the danger of living in delusion and the importance of seeking truth and understanding the mysteries of life and death.

Transcript

Resurrection is the assurance of the Presence of Christ with us eternally.

Good Friday and Easter, two days that changed the world forever.

We live our lives in denial, as if death will never come. But sooner or later, death comes to everybody. What is death? Is there life after death? Most of us only begin to ask these questions at the end of life, when the certainty of death can no longer be ignored. By that time we may be caught by surprise and ill-equipped to deal with the situation at hand. A perfectly natural, and even beautiful stage of life, becomes overcast with fear and confusion. Why wait 'til the end? Why not ask these questions now, while there's time to make a serious investigation?

We may recall from the history that awful incident on April 14th, 1912 when the HMS Titanic, on her maiden voyage from England to the United States, struck an iceberg in the icy waters off the Atlantic. Within two-and-a-half hours the then largest ship afloat--a ship claimed to be unsinkable--had plunged to the bottom of the ocean. All but 705 of the nearly 1500 passengers and crew aboard perished. The builders of this luxury liner were so confident of her sea-worthiness that they only provided sufficient lifeboats to accommodate half of the passengers and crew. When disaster struck, there was total chaos. The following is how one reporter pieced together the story of that tragic night.

"In the panic and confusion that reigned in the early hours of April 15, orders were misunderstood, mistakes were made, fights broke out; some boats were launched with no one aboard but a handful of the ship's crew, and a few were even launched empty. While those in the boats watched, horrified, the ship tilted steadily toward the vertical. At 2:20 AM, with a great moaning sigh as the remaining airspace was displaced by water, a sigh which survivors would later describe as sounding like the dying breath of some immense wounded beast, the gigantic ship slid beneath the surface. In the eerie silence that followed, all that could be heard were muffled sobs of grief from the boats, and the faint cries for help uttered by the few who had strength enough to jump off and swim away from the ship."

It is difficult to comprehend how the owners of the Titanic were under such a delusion that nothing could go wrong. Little did they or the crew and passengers know when they boarded the ship with such excitement and confidence as they set sail for North America that they were headed for such a disaster. What could be more tragic in life to live under the delusion that we are on a joy ride and all the while be headed for a disastrous end.

Life is a mystery- from the flower that blooms on the valley, to the highest forms of conscious and intelligent existence. But what shall we say of death? Life, clothed with sensation, thought, and activity, was the last and highest act of the Creator's power. But death -- that mysterious change which defaced the beauty of this living creation, and breaks in pieces this most excellent monument of divine wisdom -- what is it, but one of the highest and most striking proofs of the omnipotence of God, which spares not this his noblest work? See this beautiful vase dashed and broken! Not a vestige of its fair proportions remains. The living inhabitant that once occupied it is gone to some distant world; and the once beautified, adorned mansion is already beginning to be decomposed, and returning to its original dust. Nothing but desolation and decay are visible, and the stillness of death reigns throughout its deserted chambers.

The fields of science have been explored by his wisdom and industry. By his authority over the elements, he has compassed earth and ocean, and well near annihilated space. But with all his capacity for great and noble achievement, he has never been able to enlarge the boundaries of human life. Death's arrows are sharp. His hand is unerring and ruthless. The giant stalks unseen, and throughout all the vast arena of his conflicts, none can resist, or evade his ravages. We may weep. We may tremble. But we cannot escape his fury. Man has no power to ward off the stroke of death. But does the history of man terminate in the tomb? Is the grave a world of everlasting oblivion?

Life is often defined by the questions we ask. People have long asked, "Is there life after death?" Book of Job in the Bible is very significant to understand important things about Life. Job too asked this vital question "If someone dies, will they live again? Job 14:14. Almost everyone at some point in life asks, "Why do bad things happen to good people? What is the meaning of life? What's our destiny?"

The question is very important--so is the answer. Apart from the Bible, there is no valid answer. All human answers are vain and do not satisfy the longing soul. When talking to people of all walks of life, we find that we differ most in opinion about the above questions but the Bible is the only reliable source that gives answers to all those questions.

When God created mankind in his own image, Bible says "The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die." (Genesis 2:17). The generally-accepted assumption is that

Adam and Eve would live forever, if they obeyed God. But, we know that they did not obey. When tempted with the appealing fruit and the opportunity to be like God, they ate of the tree. Thus, sin entered the world, "and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned" (Romans 5:12). Since that time, man has had to deal with death as an unnatural occurrence.

Now Life was created with power over death. Adam had power over life and death in his hands. The law of life, therefore, is also in the hands of man. Death had no influence or authority over man. God told man that the day that he ate the fruit, he would activate death. Thus death is a law, as the Apostle Paul said, "Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death" (Rom 8:2). The only way to preserve life is to follow the laws by which God created everything to function. Every maker creates a product with inbuilt laws. For instance, a car engine is made to function by petrol. You cannot buy a car and say that you do not like petrol anymore and decide to use something else. If you do so, the car would malfunction. All products come, therefore, with inherent laws and guarantee. The promise is that if you obey the laws of the maker, the car will function. If you violate the laws, the car will malfunction. That being considered, who are we to decide the laws of life? We did not create life. God created everything. Therefore, we need to find out what laws God has put in place for us to have life on this planet.

God gave life, and He created the laws. He told Adam that every living thing was given to him to control. God also told Adam that there was one law, which was also a warning, "Do not eat from that tree" (Gen 2:17). Man was told to not violate this law. When you violate a law, you punish yourself. Bible says "The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God." "But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness." Romans 8:6-8,10.

Death is the enemy of man; but it is the glory of the Gospel of Jesus that it teaches us how we may meet this last enemy with triumph. When Jesus Christ was on his way to the grave of Lazarus, he proclaimed, "I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying." John 11:25

It is a fairly well-established fact that Jesus Christ was publicly executed in Judea in the 1st Century A.D., under Pontius Pilate, by means of crucifixion, at the behest of the Jewish Sanhedrin. The non-Christian historical accounts of Flavius Josephus, Cornelius Tacitus, Lucian of Samosata, Maimonides and even the Jewish Sanhedrin corroborate the early Christian eyewitness accounts of these important historical aspects of the death of Jesus Christ.

Christians across the world celebrate Easter, to commemorate the resurrection of Jesus Christ on the third day after his crucifixion. The celebration of Easter is preceded by the forty days of Lent, a period of prayer and self-denial for believers. The period of Lent includes Holy Week, the week immediately preceding Easter Sunday.

The story unfolded more than two thousand years ago, in a stable in Bethlehem,

Jesus was born in a small town to a poor family about 2000 years ago in a country called Palestine and spent the first thirty years of his life in obscurity, swinging a hammer with his dad. When Jesus was a young man, he saw the suffering of the people of Palestine under the oppressive rule of Herod's sons, and the Roman procurators. Together with twelve disciples, Jesus wandered the countryside, preaching the love of God for His people. He was concerned with the welfare of the poor and the oppressed and spoke

against the hypocrisy of the privileged and the rich. The Pharisees, Jewish scholars, strongly opposed his teachings, and resented his growing influence. But Jesus was welcomed and loved by the common people who looked upon him as the long-awaited Messiah. As the number of his followers and his influence with the people grew, the Jewish and Roman authorities began to suspect Jesus of being a revolutionary.

Jesus' public ministry spanned only three short years before he was put to death for declaring himself to be God. In the pages of Scripture, which exist to reveal him, we discover that while Jesus loved children, fed the hungry, befriended the marginalized, healed the sick, encouraged the downhearted, and rebuked the religiously self-righteous, the light of Scripture shines most clearly on the final week of his life and his work of atonement through the cross and empty tomb.

The Jewish leaders wanted Jesus to be guilty. They found it difficult to find anything that he had done wrong, even though they paid people to lie about him. Eventually they asked him if he was the Son of God. Jesus replied 'I am.' This was enough. They said this was an insult to God. Jesus was taken before Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor, and Pilate, asked what he should do with Jesus, and known as the 'King of the Jews'. 'Crucify him!' shouted the people. Pilate asked 'Why? What has he done?' The people continued to shout. Pilate called for a bowl of water and let everyone see him washing his hands of sending an innocent man to his death.

The soldiers took Jesus away, removed his clothes and dressed him in a purple robe. On his head they placed a crown of thorns. Mocking him they knelt down before him and said 'Hail, King of the Jews'. As the blood ran down his forehead they made fun of him. Jesus never said a word.

Then they took him away and laid a heavy wooden cross on his back. Jesus was made to carry the cross out of the city gates and up a nearby hill. On the way some of the crowd cheered, others wept.

On top of the hill Jesus was put on the cross and nails were put through his hands and feet. The cross was raised up. Two robbers were also put on crosses, one on either side of Jesus. One of the robbers was feeling very afraid. Jesus spoke to him and comforted him. Jesus' mother watched him on the cross. He called to one of his friends to look after her now. At noon darkness fell on the land. It lasted a few hours. Jesus cried out aloud, 'My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?' In the sadness and the dark, Jesus died.

Jesus spoke seven times during the closing moments on the Cross. The seven utterances of Jesus from the cross are known of eternal significance to those who listen to them, a heroic confrontation of evil inspiring millions the world over. The words which Jesus uttered on the Cross are worthy of special consideration because of who uttered them, where they were uttered, why they were spoken, and what they mean. They are precious because they are deep expressions of the Eternal son of God in His time of terrible agony in those moments when He actually paid the price of our redemption. Here is the greatest mystery of all time: God chooses to reveal God's divine glory in humiliation and poverty - where all beauty is gone; all eloquence is silenced; all admiration is withdrawn - it is here that God chooses to manifest His unconditional love for us through His son Jesus.

At the moment Jesus died, the earth shook. One of the soldiers who had been keeping guard said 'This man was the Son of God.' Many people began to feel afraid. Some of the friends of Jesus and his mother waited for permission from Pontius Pilate to take Jesus down from the cross. They laid the body in a tomb cut in the rock. The tomb was sealed with a large stone.

Two days later a faithful follower of Jesus known as Mary Magdalena went to the tomb. She was astonished to find that the huge stone had been moved and the body had gone.

She ran to tell Peter and John (Disciples of Jesus) who only found burial sheets in the tomb. Mary, weeping, was approached by a man she did not know, who asked her why she was crying. She explained that it was because they had taken her Lord away. The man was Jesus rose from the dead. Believing him to be the gardener, Mary asked if he knew where Jesus body had been taken.

Jesus said 'Mary, it is I'. Mary was full of joy. Jesus told her to tell his friends that she had seen him and that he would soon be with his father in Heaven. Mary ran back to tell all their friends the news. At first not everyone believed her.

Later Jesus appeared to the disciples several times. Once, when they had been fishing on the Sea of Galilee, he called to them from the shore. He asked them if they had caught many fish. They replied 'Nothing.' Jesus told them to drop their nets on the right side of the boat. They did this and when they pulled in their nets, they were full of fish. It was only then that they realised that the man was Jesus. They came ashore and had a meal of fish with him.

Later Jesus spoke to all of the disciples telling them that once he had left them they would receive the power of the Holy Spirit. He wanted them to spread the word of God throughout the world. Jesus was then taken up into heaven. Two angels appeared and told his friends not to be sad because one day Jesus would return. The second coming of Jesus Christ is the hope of believers that God is in control of all things, and is faithful to the promises and prophecies in His Word. In His first coming, Jesus Christ came to earth as a baby in a manger in Bethlehem, just as prophesied. Jesus fulfilled all the prophecies of the Messiah during His birth, life, ministry, death, and resurrection. However, there are some 668 prophecies regarding the second coming. The second coming of Christ will be the return of Christ to fulfill these remaining prophecies. In His first coming, Jesus was the suffering Servant. In His second coming, Jesus will be the conquering King. In His first coming, Jesus arrived in the most humble of circumstances. In His second coming, Jesus will arrive with the armies of heaven at His side.

Two thousand years have passed since the Crucifixion and resurrection Day, yet the Bible account enables us to visualize the event with a great deal of accuracy. As we gaze up at the death and resurrection, we realize that it is only because he was willing die on the cross that we don't have to live lives of desperation. The darkness in our hearts that makes us surrender to the power of death, the darkness in our society which makes us victims of violence, war and destruction has been dispelled by the light that shines forth from the One who gave his life as complete gift.

The thought of death causes fear and anguish. We fear death for we do not know what to expect from it. We haven't had someone go there and come back to really tell us what it is like. We fear it, because we see it as a cutting short of our life and activity. Throughout history many have made lists of "things to do before I die." Too many fear they will not accomplish all the things they want to before they die. And, as we all know, after death, there is no coming back.

Death also causes anguish for the family and friends of the one who had died. In the passage from John 11, we see that Martha and Mary, the sisters of Lazarus are very saddened, because their brother has died. Their broken hearts cry out to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." Later in the chapter we are told that even Jesus wept at the grave site. As God and man, he was deeply touched by the idea of death.

Besides physical death, we must also consider the idea of spiritual death. When Adam and Eve sinned, they immediately died spiritually, and they began to die physically. Their spirit became dead to God, no longer understanding the things of God, and no longer desiring to be with God. It is just such a dead spirit that we all inherit from our first parents when we are born.

Scripture speaks of two deaths. The first death is the separation of the spirit from the body. This is physical death, and for believers it is merely a passage to glory (Philippians 1:21-26). The second death is the separation of the spirit from God. This is spiritual death, and it is to be dreaded above all else. By the same token, we can see two resurrections for believers. The first is the deliverance of God's elect from their state of death in trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1). The second will be that glorious day when the bodies of all who died in the Lord will be raised, reunited with their spirits, and ushered into the presence of God for all eternity.

Both these resurrections are rooted in Christ Jesus. It is only because of his accomplished work of redemption on the cross that sins are forgiven, guilt is removed, and believers are brought into the kingdom of God. Also, it is only through his defeat of death on that same cross that we are assured a resurrection to glory (Romans 6:8-9; 1 Corinthians 15: 20 & 57; Colossians 1:18; 1 Thessalonians 4:16).

Bible says "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! Who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

Resurrection symbolizes victory over sin, death, and all destructive forces in people's lives. One of the greatest assurances of life after death is anchored in the forty incredible days Jesus spent on the earth after His resurrection. During this dramatic season of heaven on earth in which Jesus made several appearances, we gain invaluable insight into the priorities of our life and following Christ. Resurrection is the cornerstone of our faith. It is precisely because the physical resurrection of Christ is at the very heart of our faith and Hope.

Right at the heart of Easter lies the central purpose of God - to glorify Himself by redeeming the mankind and giving a new hope and everlasting life. Resurrection of Jesus made all the difference in the world. The death of the body, some day, is strangely linked, in a way that we do not fully comprehend, with the death which is at work in our inner lives, right now. That is, death is all one thing, whether it takes place and affects the physical body some day, or whether it is taking place within the spirit of man today. It is all of a piece. And that inner death is what we experience in a thousand ways - sometimes as loneliness, bitterness, emptiness, despair, depression of spirit, and sometimes it is malice and resentment and violence. Whatever it may be, it is not what God intended for man. It is an enemy which has seized man and lives with him and haunts him in everything he does. The glorious hope as it is in Jesus, is that Jesus Christ, in dying and rising from the dead, that he defeated it by his risen power. And the result is peace instead of restlessness, acceptance rather than guilt, love in place of lust or hate, power to replace weakness, joy for mourning, beauty for ashes, hope for despair, courage in place of cowardice, and cleansing from all dirt and filth of spirit.

Easter stands for the presence of Christ with us to meet the pressures of life as they come to us day by day. When our hopes crush, & dreams collapse, the resurrection of Jesus is designed to relieve and to bring hope to us. We celebrate Easter and the great triumph of Christ over the grave. We are also given the assurance that we will not be alone in the hour of death. There will be a divine companion with us; a hand will steady us through this time. Jesus said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you," {Heb 13:5.

When D. L. Moody, the great evangelist, was dying, his last words were, "Earth is receding, heaven is approaching; this is my crowning day." Easter is a reminder that we need have no fear about death.

This is the prediction of the resurrection in that amazing Psalm. It is where we get the verse we often quote: This is the day which the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. {Ps 118:24}

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