

# Is There Life After Death

by David Gooding

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*Through faith in Jesus Christ, we can have absolute certainty of life after death and personal assurance of our destiny.*

**Duration:** 1:02:08

**Scripture:** Job 14:7-10, Matthew 6:33, Hebrews 9:27

**Topics:** "Death"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker addresses the age-old question of whether or not there is life after death. He begins by discussing how nature provides examples of new life emerging from seemingly dead objects, such as a tree stump sprouting new branches or a seed growing into a plant. The speaker then relates this concept to human beings, pondering if the same principle applies to us when we die. He introduces Dr. David Gooding, a scholar in classics and the Bible, who will provide insights on this topic. The sermon ends with a quote from the book of Job, questioning the fate of man after death.

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## Transcript

I have an apology from one gentleman who wasn't able to make it. But I have a very nice letter from Gay Byrne, compere of the Late Late Show, apologising for his absence. Gay unfortunately had a previous engagement and isn't able to be with us.

You see, we wrote inviting him and telling him about our programme this evening because part of the inspiration for this evening came from Gay Byrne's Late Late Shows on the subject of life after death. His first show was so popular that he had to put on a second one. So many people were interested in the subject of death and what is beyond death.

A rather morbid subject, you might say. And yet it's a subject that interests each one of us. I had a young man call into my office some months ago on a Friday evening.

He was quite a bit younger than I am. He was in great form because he was going off on his holiday that evening. That was a Friday.

The following Wednesday I was at his funeral. He died very tragically. I was introduced to one of his school friends at the funeral, a chap I'd never met before.

But he said to me, you know, Jim and I were in school together. We left school the same year and 150 of us left together. And our last day in school the Dean was chatting to us and he said, 150 of you are leaving school today.

One of you will die every year. Strange thing to say. And yet this chap, he told me, that one of them had died every year.

In the space of nine years since they left school, Jim was the ninth person to die. And Jim was only 27. So death does face us all, for some, sooner than later.

And we've come along this evening, not to think of a morbid subject, but to hear something encouraging. Dr. David Gooding, here on the platform with me, is a scholar in classics and in the Bible. And he has something very interesting to tell us.

Because he has a special gift in imparting something in a way that we can understand. You know, so often we listen to people or things or programs and it's just all maybe above our heads or too deep to understand. But here this evening, we're very glad indeed to have Dr. David Gooding to speak on this subject, because we know how very well qualified he is to lecture on this subject.

Somebody suggested to me that I ought to not only introduce Dr. Gooding, but tell you who I am, because quite a few of you are strangers to me as well as to Dr. Gooding. Well, one thing I should say about Dr. Gooding, first of all, is that he's an Englishman, but he's a very sensible Englishman, because he emigrated from England to Ireland quite a few years ago. My home is in the west, or was in the west of Ireland, where they say that you're not a true Irishman unless you're born west of the Shannon.

Sir, I came to live in Bray 16 years ago, and Bray is my home now. You see, I met a girl from Bray and fell in love with her and married her. So that's why I'm living in Bray.

But my business is a printer, and as a printer, this is one of the jobs I did recently. Possibly a lot of you have seen this. And when I was getting the type set up for this, the compositor who was setting it up said to me, certainty after death.

There's no such thing as certainty after death. Well, I was quite pleased with his reaction, because as we handed these out and invited folk in Bray to come along, we were looking for a reaction, if you like. It says, certainty after death, and a question mark.

I'm going to hand over to Dr. Gooding just now. And, Dr. Gooding, is there certainty after death? Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your kindly remarks.

It is flattering of you to say that I have some very good sense, though I see your point when you remark that I have emigrated and I have been here for 13 or 14 years. I do indeed very much. I'm quite now... Pardon? Ah, very good.

Well, now, as you see, the subject that we have to talk about this evening is a topic that has been debated by men on this earth ever since there were men on the earth to debate it. Very early, Peart, some thousands of years ago now, framed it this way round. He had been looking at nature.

He observed, for instance, that if you cut down an old tree and just leave the stump of it in the ground, sometimes, though it looks dead, the old tree will begin to sprout again. As a farmer, he had watched what

happened to the seed he put in the ground. You put a bare grain of wheat or barley in the ground, and what looks dead presently begins to sprout and grows up another living plant.

And he asked himself the question, well, if you find that kind of thing happening in nature, is it possible that it happens also to human beings? When people die, do they live again? He put it like this. For there is hope of a man, of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease, though the root thereof wax old in the earth and the stalk thereof die in the ground, yet through the scent of water it will bud and put forth boughs like a plant. But man dieth and wasteth away, yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he? Where is he? Now it is the fact that through that basic question that millions of men and women have asked themselves at some time or other, the vast majority of people have come to the conclusion and have firmly believed that yes, there is life after death.

And the more thoughtful among them have come to their conclusion that there is life after death, not because they have come to believe in ghosts or anything spooky, but for far more weighty and serious reasons. If I might give you one of the main reasons that multitudes of people, not just Christians, but all folks of different kinds throughout the world, throughout the centuries, one of the reasons why they have come to believe that there is such a thing as a life after death, it would run like this. One of the basic and fundamental reasons is man's own innate sense of right and wrong.

There is not one of us but has in him, deeply seated, a sense that there ought to be fair play. There is such a thing as justice. There is such a thing as right and wrong.

The workman at his work believes it. The trade unions believe it. The capitalist believes it.

Man is forever claiming his rights. He feels there is such a thing as rights that other people ought to acknowledge. And when we think about these things, we should observe, all of us, that that kind of feeling that we have in our hearts is not something that we ourselves invented.

I dare say you have caught yourself like I have caught myself sometimes proposing to do something that I know is a bit shady or wrong, only I want to do it because it is to my advantage. And when I propose to myself doing this thing that I know is wrong, then I find my own conscience takes sides against me. And I feel ashamed of myself.

And I feel an old cad for doing what I'm about to do. And that kind of feeling is universal in mankind. Mankind as the whole has taken it that this sense of right and wrong inside him is not something he invented, but like all else, comes from an almighty creator.

And having decided that, man has looked around his world and he's made another step forward in his thinking. He has observed that in this life, justice is not always done. In fact, in some sense, it's rarely done.

There's Hitler, for instance, to take a glaring example of something we all know about. Hitler decides to get himself vast power. And with his jackbooted stormtroopers, he oppresses millions of people on the way gassing six million Jews, to speak nothing of the other millions that he slaughtered.

And for a while, he enjoys his power and struts up and down the stage of history. And then when things get too hot for him and he's had his fling, he just puts a bullet through his brain and disappears. And men have said, look, if our sense of right and wrong is not something that we invented ourselves, but comes from God, and there is a God who cares for justice, then there must be a life after death when that God

who cares for justice settles accounts with men.

And that's why you will find, I think universally, that all people who believe in a life after death find, along with that belief, goes another belief, that after death there will be some kind of judgment, when life's injustices are sorted out. I don't know how that appeals to you. You may find that a very gloomy notion.

The Bible, of course, repeats it. It is true. It is appointed unto men once to die and after death, the judgment.

In fact, though it is solemn, that is far from being very gloomy, if you will think about it for a moment. The fact that after death there comes a judgment is the biggest compliment that God ever paid to humankind. God takes us men and women seriously.

God holds the view that what we men and women do really matters and eternally matters. And because what we do matters, we ourselves matter. And I want to put it to you right now, at the beginning of this lecture, that though that may seem to you a very gloomy view, the atheist who denies that there is a God and denies that there is a world to come, the atheist it is that is the fearful pessimist and offers you the biggest insult he could possibly offer you.

For the atheist says that when the day is done and life is over, it will all be seen then that what you have done never really mattered, for when you die you're finished and not only what you did didn't matter, but what you are doesn't matter. And I for one would take a lot of convincing that that is the true estimate of humanity, that what people do doesn't matter in the end and what they are doesn't matter in the end. If I have any wishful thinking in the matter at all, you can begin to see, can't you, that my wishful thinking would lead me in the direction of wanting to believe that we humans are significant, that what we do matters and that what we are matters.

Therefore there must be a life after death. But tonight I am not proposing to myself to discuss with you what people have thought and the various kinds of philosophies that have argued for a life after death. For as our chairman reminded us, our topic is, can there be certainty about life after death? And the answer to that question is, yes there can be certainty, but there is only absolute certainty from one source and that source is Jesus Christ our Lord.

And the answer to my question that I have set this lecture, certainty after death, is yes, that in Christ there is absolute certainty and certainty on two counts. I would like us to get both these things. Christ can give us certainty on the fact that there is an existence after death.

But even more important than that, Christ can give to each one of us certainty as to his own personal destiny after death. And I mention that second thing for this very real and practical reason. There are many people who hold with some certainty the view, yes there is life after death, who are not certain, however, of this second thing.

If you were to put to them the general proposition, do you think there is life after death? They would say, yes, I suppose there is. If you were to say to them, and are you personally sure of where you will be after death? They would probably say, no. And some of them might even add that then nobody can be sure where they're going to land up after death.

Therefore I want to make these two points. That Jesus Christ our Lord can give us certainty both as to the fact, yes, there is life after death. And secondly, the individual and personal assurance of what is going to

happen to each one of us after death.

How can Christ give us assurance of the fact? Well first of all let us remember exactly who Jesus Christ is. There are many people, it seems to me, who have not quite thought through who Jesus Christ is. Presently we shall be celebrating Christmas and people will be talking of Jesus as the babe in the manger.

They will talk a lot of sentimental things about being kind and loving and nice to children. But if we are going to understand what Jesus Christ says, we must first of all observe who he claimed to be. And his basic claim was this, that he, to use his own language, he came from above.

Talking to his contemporaries, he said on one occasion, look gentlemen, you are from beneath. That is, you are born by the normal processes of birth. You come of this earth.

In that sense, I am different. I came from above. On that same occasion, he said to his contemporaries, he said, you remember your father, your forefather Abraham? And as they thought of him, they looked back down centuries of time, right all down the mists of time into ancient history.

Yes, Abraham. They had heard about him. But he said, let me tell you, before Abraham was, I am.

That is, he was claiming to be the eternal God, come down from his heaven into our earth, in order to link us up with his eternity. That is why we can be certain of what he says about life on the other side of time, of what it means to be in eternity. He is not theorizing.

Talking to a learned theologian one day and urging upon that theologian needed to be born again if ever he were to enter the kingdom of God. He said, look here, old chap. What I am telling you is what I actually know.

I am not spinning you a theory. I am not philosophizing on the possibilities. We speak that which we do know.

He speaks from first-hand experience as the Son of God come down out of God's heaven. That there is that other world. There is something beyond our time.

If you ask, but then how can we be sure that Jesus Christ in making that claim was true? Then one answer to that question is simply this. That his own personal resurrection from the dead affords us abundant evidence that his claim was true. I have not the time at my disposal this evening to discuss in detail with you the evidence that the resurrection of Jesus Christ was a historical fact.

I wish I had. But there is so much evidence that it would take two or three sessions of this length even sketchily to survey it. The resurrection of Christ, ladies and gentlemen, is not as something that you have to make up your mind to believe because you are determined to believe it taking a step of faith in the dark without any evidence.

There is overwhelming evidence that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. Evidence material and psychological and historical. Let me simply mention one tiny strand of evidence among the many that could be mentioned.

The very fact that here in Bray, as throughout Europe, as throughout the five continents of the world, there is today a Christian church that worships on a Sunday, on the first day of the week, is, when you ponder it, a very powerful piece of evidence that Jesus rose from the dead. For, you will remember, that the early

disciples, Christian disciples, were in fact Jews. They never celebrated the first day of the week permanently every week, every year.

They were Jews. Their regular day of worship was a Sabbath. When Jesus Christ was here on earth with them, they didn't observe the first day of the week.

They were Jews. Their regular day of observation was a Sabbath, a Saturday as we call it. Now it is the fact that for nearly 2,000 years people in Europe and in the other continents have worshipped on a Sunday.

Why on earth do they do that? Why did these Jews change? You can trace it back right to those early Christians, that they suddenly changed and started to celebrate the first day of the week. Why? Let me point out to you again that when they started to celebrate that first day of the week, they did it in spite of tremendous persecution that almost at once they drew to themselves in part for this very custom. Why did they do it then if it brought such a furore of persecution on themselves? If you've got to account for it starting somehow, it would have been so much more convenient just to go on as they were before as Jews and escape all the persecution.

What made them change? And the answer to that great and colossal historic phenomenon is the great and powerful historic fact. They changed because one Sunday morning Jesus Christ rose from the dead and began that movement that we call Christianity that has flourished ever since. But as I say, to discuss in great detail all the many strands of evidence would take me far beyond my topic this evening.

I want to come to another line by which we may attain to certainty. We may have certainty, as I say, as to the fact that there is an eternity, that there is an existence beyond death for every one of us. We may be certain of the fact because of the person of Christ, who he is that has told us, because of his resurrection that proves it.

But now when it comes to the second bit of our question, how may I personally attain to certainty? And certainty not merely that I shall survive the grave, but that I shall survive, to put it crudely, in the right place. We can begin to find that certainty if we will look at what the Bible says that Christ has done about this thing called death. There are two prominent things that the Bible says Christ has done.

It says first that for the believer he has removed the sting of death. And secondly, he has made powerless him that had the power of death, that is the devil, and so he has delivered people who all their lifetime were subject to bondage because of fear of death. That is, Christ removes the sting of death, the Bible says, for those who trust him.

And he removes the fear of death and the bondage that is associated with that fear. Now what is this thing that the Bible calls the sting of death? The sting of death, says the Bible, is sin. Now let's get things clear in our minds.

Dying is a slightly different thing from death. Dying can be a sudden thing. We can die, in that sense, without noticing it.

Or it can be a long, protracted and nasty thing. But the sting of our death is not the nasty process that leads up to physical death. The sting of death, says the Bible, is sin.

Because there is no denying of the fact that when man faces the challenge of physical death, it rivets home upon his conscience the fact that he is a sinner. And as we said at the beginning of this talk, there is an inseparable bond in the mind of man between an eternity out there, beyond life, and the fact that there is a judgment out there beyond life. To find a loved one who has struggled unsuccessfully against illness and at last has died, that is a very sorry thing.

But there is a terrible sting behind that. To be uncertain what God is going to say about that loved one's sin. And you see, this is the reason why many people try to brush the whole topic of death under the carpet.

The reason why many people try and prove that there is no life after death. Because if there is a life after death, then there is a judgment after death. When people are uncertain how they stand vis-à-vis that judgment, then the thought of death appalls them and frightens them and makes their conscience uneasy.

There is a sting in death. The way we come to personal assurance on this matter is to allow Christ to take from death its sting. The sting of death is sin, says the Bible, and the strength of sin is the law.

That means simply this. When I've sinned and I think of its possible eternal consequence, then I naturally get afraid and I want to wriggle. And I want to try and tell myself that it doesn't matter.

When I try to do that, God's law witnesses to my conscience. But, old chap, you can't get out of it that way. Sin does matter.

Let me take a lurid example. I'm a bit of a show-off of a fellow. And I got a new car and I love driving my car down the cul-de-sac at a hundred to see whether I can stop, you know, within an inch or two of the fence.

And you warn me about the danger of this, about the toddlers that play in the cul-de-sac, but I'm such a show-off, I can't listen to you, and one of these days I come down the cul-de-sac at an extraordinary speed and I run over your child. Now, I sinned. Grievously sinned.

Are you going to listen to me when I try to tell you that it doesn't matter in the end? Oh, no. Use the common sense to see that it matters. God's law is on your side.

God's law says it matters. The strength of sin is the law. Now, it is that sting that Christ removes for those that trust Him.

Because when He died, the Bible says He bore our sins in His body. He died to atone for sin. He died to pay the penalty of sin.

And in a wonderful way, His death has made it possible for God to forgive and to wipe out, as though they never existed, the sins that we have done. And with sin forgiven and our heart and conscience put at rest, that God has been perfectly just in forgiving my sin. And God also says that Christ has delivered and does deliver people from the fear of death.

You know, the fear of death is a very real thing. It will pervert people's personalities. It can make them very selfish.

It can make them very religious. Men will toil at all sorts of back-breaking works in the name of religion because at the back of what they do is a fear of death. Christ has come that He might deliver us from that

fear of death.

The Bible says He has done it by Himself dying. By dying, He has made powerless him that had the power of death, that is, the devil, so that He might deliver from bondage those who all their lifetime feared death. You see, since Christ has died, death for the believer changes its very nature.

The other afternoon I was walking down the road when I heard an air-raid siren. It took my mind back to the days of the Second World War when there was an air-raid siren about six houses down the road from the house I lived in. I remember quite well what I felt like when I heard that first air-raid siren with its fearful old wail and grim warning that the Germans were coming with their bombers.

I vividly remember the nights we spent in fear in the east of England when the air-raid sirens went. The other day, as I say, I heard an air-raid siren. Same sound, but no shivers went down my spine.

There was no fear, no sweat. You say, why not? Was the sound itself any better? No, the sound was still the old waily, waily, waily of the siren. But you see, it meant a different thing for me now than it did those years ago.

And so Christ delivers those who trust Him from the fear of death because for the man and woman who believes Christ, death is a different thing. It has a different significance for the man who is not saved, for the woman whose sins are not forgiven, for the person that has no peace with God, physical death is not only unpleasant in itself, but it is the fearful introduction to an eternity of misery. But for the man and woman that have received Christ and been forgiven and are at peace with God, physical death is no such thing.

It is but the gateway into the presence of God, into the presence of Christ, the very Savior who died for them. It said one of the early Christians to depart like that and to be with Christ, it is far better than anything you two have ever known in life. So then Christ begins to give us personal certainty in our own hearts.

When we trust Him, by doing these two things for us, He removes the sting of death through His cross, through His forgiveness, through His redemption. He removes the fear of death because He thus transforms death into a very gateway into God's own heaven. But there is another ground for certainty.

And I want you to slowly hear, because it is a wonderful thing, but perhaps a little bit difficult to understand. How can I be certain that there is a life beyond a grave? How can I be certain that when I leave this life, I shall be with God in God's heaven? Our Lord Himself was asked the question at one stage by some people called Sadducees. They complimented themselves, did Sadducees, on being rather intellectual.

And they posed a question to Christ about the resurrection which they thought was going to prove that any resurrection to a life to come was utterly impossible. Among the things Christ said in His answer to their question was this. Now gentlemen, said He, that there is a resurrection, that there is an eternity of life with God after this life is done.

I will prove to you, said He, from what God said to Moses way back in Old Testament times, in the book of Exodus. When God came down to speak to Moses, God said to Moses like this, Moses, I am the God of your fathers. I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.

So said Christ, you may deduce from that, that there is a life beyond a grave. You say, how on earth do you do that? How do you deduce that there is an eternal existence beyond a grave from the simple fact that God said, I am the God of Abraham? Well, let's think about that. When God said, I am the God of Abraham, He didn't just mean, did He, I am Abraham's creator, because He's everybody's creator.

When God said, I am the God of Abraham, He meant that He was related to Abraham and Abraham personally related to Him. Abraham was a man with whom God had had personal dealings. Abraham was a man who himself had had personal dealings with God.

They knew one another. The Bible describes Abraham as the friend of God. He walked day by day with God in fellowship with God.

He knew God even in this life. There was a relationship between them. Now what are you going to think about that kind of relationship that God sets up with men? Why, said Christ, the only thing you possibly can think about it is that that relationship is an eternal relationship.

God doesn't pick up friends and then after some days ditch them. If God became Abraham's personal friend and there was a relationship between them, you may be utterly sure that that's a relationship that is eternal because God is eternal and the nature of His friendship is that it is eternal. We don't think much of a friend who takes us up and is keenly friendly with us for three months and then suddenly ditches us.

God wouldn't be God if He did the same with men. There's a silly little advertisement. Well, it isn't so silly.

I mustn't say there because every one of you will contradict me. But there is an advertisement in some papers sometimes that presents a glowing young couple choosing their engagement ring or something or other and within the diamond is pictured all the sparkling, the caption underneath says diamonds are forever. Of course, it's a bit of sentiment aimed at increasing the jeweller's income.

But for all that, for all its sentimentality, it is saying something, isn't it? When a man and woman fall deeply in love, they feel they want to pledge themselves one to another, they feel this relationship is a relationship that's got to be permanent. Not merely because they enjoy it, but they feel that the relationship itself is one of those things that to be a true relationship has got to be permanent. Alas, this life doesn't always live up to that kind of feeling.

But it may serve as an illustration of what this relationship is that God forms with men who come to Him through Jesus Christ. It is a personal relationship, it is a personal friendship, and it is a relationship that by its very nature is eternal. That's why, ladies and gentlemen, the Bible calls that relationship eternal life.

Let me therefore point out what is an exceedingly interesting and important thing. The Bible rarely talks of people going to heaven when they die, though it believes in it, and people do go to heaven if they trust Christ when they die. The Bible far more frequently talks about receiving eternal life here and now in this world.

You say, what is eternal life? Well, let Jesus Christ define it for you. Eternal life is to know the only and true God, to know Him as a friend knows friend, as a man knows his wife, to know God personally and intimately, to know God. It is to enter a relationship with God, and that relationship, says Christ, is eternal life, already begun, and it is a relationship that having begun in this life is utterly unbreakable.

That is the glorious relationship that Christ offers every single one of us. I am come, He says, that you might have life, and that you might have it more abundantly. I give unto my sheep, He says, eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall anyone pluck them out of my Father's hand.

It is the relationship of which Paul speaks when he says, I am persuaded that neither life nor death, principalities or powers, things present or to come, I am persuaded, he says, that nothing shall be able to separate me from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. So we find that death, that when we started seemed to be a gloomy subject, is in fact a subject to be welcomed. It focuses our mind very keenly, doesn't it? Not merely on what lies beyond the grave, but what this life is about.

I make bold to say that no man and no woman has ever understood fully what this life is about until they have faced the fact of death and the consequent eternity. For this life is a much bigger thing than just going to work and coming home, going to work and coming home, eating your carrots and your currants, getting married, setting up a home, being successful in business and in the end falling into a grave. This life itself is bigger.

For it is in this life, says Christ, that we begin, if ever we are to begin, this relationship with God that is eternal life. Let me illustrate what I mean by a simple illustration. This Christmas time, doubtless you will go into some homes and you will see the rather pleasant sight of Father with his ten-year-old boy on the carpet, in front of the fire, playing with his Christmas present.

The Christmas present is a train and the ten-year-old is enjoying it and I fancy Father is enjoying it as well, as much if not more. They are playing with these trains, Father and Son. Of course it is a jolly interesting thing to play with trains on the floor.

But as they play with those trains on the floor something else is happening. There is a relationship now beginning to build up between that ten-year-old boy and his father. The boy is coming to understand his father, coming to love his father, coming to know his father and the father is getting to know the boy.

And please God, if things go well, that relationship that is growing up is going to be a thing that will last through the whole of life and it will last long after the old train set has been put in the bin, long after the boy wants to play with trains. The relationship with his parent that was then formed will last. This is what Jesus Christ is saying to every one of us men and women.

Let death focus your attention on what this life is about. Not enough to have some crude idea, oh well heaven, I'll think of that, you know, when I come to die. Because that is to miss the most significant thing even in this life.

When I say it reverently, God has come down to our earth to play trains with us on our very carpet so that life's experience in the here and now should begin to be the basis upon which we may find God and enter into a personal relationship with God. To receive now eternal life, to have it and to know it so that when this life is done the relationship remains eternally. And if I were to ask, be asked where I would put the biggest emphasis on how a man and woman can be absolutely certain of eternal life after death, I would say without any hesitation, the greatest certainty comes through entering into this personal relationship with God through Christ here in this life.

If I were to ask you, sir, how do you know your wife will be faithful to you as she promised until death? You wouldn't be able to prove it to me logically or by some arithmetical formula. You would reply, but I know my

wife. If you ask me how I can be sure of life after death in God's heaven with God, I would say, but my good man, I can't prove it to you, of course, by a mathematical formula.

I know it because I know God through Jesus Christ. I have received that relationship, that very life of God that Christ has brought into being. I know Him.

What then happens at death? I shall have to divide my answer into two bits, as perhaps now you will see. Eternal life has been made possible because of what Jesus did at the cross. If eternal life is a something we receive now in this life through faith in Christ, then obviously isn't it going to be, it's going to be very obvious that what happens at death will be different according to whether you have or you have not in this life entered into personal relationship with God.

Let's take the man or woman that has received Christ personally in true repentance and faith. They have personally received the Savior and received this gift of eternal life and relationship with God. What happens to them when they die? The Bible describes what happens to their body as a sleep.

That's all. They fall asleep. Lovely word, isn't it? When children get too tired and they become fractious and difficult to deal with and full of tears at the slightest provocation, a wise parent sees they can't stand anymore and they just put the child to bed and it goes to sleep.

Being asleep isn't the highest form of life you could imagine, but it's not a disaster, is it? When a man or woman that has trusted Christ physically dies, all it is, says the Bible, is a sleep. Not the highest form of life you could imagine, but not a disaster. Something that, under certain circumstances, can be positively welcomed.

But that person's soul or spirit, however you like to describe it, what happens to that? Well, the Bible is very clear. The moment a believer physically dies, the real inner man, his soul or spirit, goes that very moment to be with Christ. Says the Apostle Paul, when we are at home in the body, in that sense, we are absent from the Lord.

But to be absent from the body is to be at once and forthwith present with the Lord. You will remember that that is what our Lord told the dying thief, as he has come to be known. And that man, in true repentance, turned toward Christ and said, Lord, remember me when you come in your kingdom.

Our Lord didn't just say, yes, I will, at last, in that very final day, when I come in my kingdom, I will remember you. He said to the thief, my good man, this very day, thou shalt be with me in paradise. Oh, that is a glorious thing.

Talk about taking away death's sting. It positively puts a radiance around it, doesn't it? Absent from the body, present with the Lord, no interval, no long waiting years of suffering, but immediately, absent from the body, present with the Lord. I had occasion to feel its thrill just a year ago when my own father died.

As we, his sons and daughters, gathered round his bed, watched this elderly man come to the end of his days and enter home to the Father's home above, it was a glorious thrill. Yes, we cried, yes, we sorrowed, we're not stoics, at the thought of leaving him, at the thought of the actual physical suffering he was going through. What a thrill when we bent over and said, Dad, you're going home to see the old man's face light up with joy and gladness.

And he lifted his hand and tried to sing. And we stood round his bed and sang with him those lovely words of that old-fashioned Christian hymn, We go to meet the Saviour, His glorious face to see. Death has lost its sting.

And then there comes, finally, says the Bible, for the believer, the very resurrection of his body. For when Christ comes again, the Bible roundly declares that the dead in Christ shall rise. The living Christians be caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air.

And with bodies like the glorious body that our Lord now has, they shall forever be with the Lord. But with that same certainty, we have to face the grave reality of what happens to the man or woman who die without this personal relationship with God. Die unforgiven.

Die unsaved. Die without ever having been born again. Die unreconciled to God.

What happens there? For them, physical death is a horror. How can it be anything else? Let me hasten to point out to you that when physical death comes along in such a case, it only makes permanent a kind of death that those people have already been living. The Bible declares that until a man has personally come to know God, has personally been saved through Jesus Christ, he is in a very deep and profound sense already dead.

That is to say, he is spiritually dead. You can test it any day of the week you like. You will try and understand why it is that multitudes of men and women, though they are God's creatures, have no interest in God whatsoever and get embarrassed if you start to talk about God.

And if you were to say to them, do you personally know God? Are you saved? They would think you were a little bit cranky and get awfully embarrassed or think you're rude and that you shouldn't ask such questions. Why is it that men and women get so horribly embarrassed when they're asked about their Creator? The Bible says because they are dead, you know, to their Creator. You say, in what sense dead? They're separated from Him.

There's a big gulf between Him and them. The gulf of sin. The gulf of sin that has not yet been forgiven.

The old story tells us that when Adam and Eve sinned and God then came down, as He frequently came down into the garden to talk with them, they ran off. And to run away from God as a somebody you would be embarrassed to meet, that is, ladies and gentlemen, death. God is all there is of life.

He has given us physical life in order that we might come to the possession of spiritual life. But if we run away, like Adam and Eve did because of our sins, we are already spiritually dead. And when a person that has always been running away from God never personally come through Jesus Christ and been saved and reconciled to God, when physical death overtakes them, it makes permanent that state of spiritual death.

And in describing it, our Lord said that between them and the presence of God, there is eternally a great gulf fixed. You say to yourself perhaps, well, that's very hard, that sounds to me very cruel. How can I believe in a God that would allow anybody to perish eternally, to exist in some kind of hell eternally? Why doesn't God do something about it? Why doesn't God give them another chance in the life to come? My good friend, if it were possible to give them another chance, you might rest upon it that the God who loves us so much that he gave his son to die for us would give us every chance it were possible to give.

The fact that Jesus Christ says there is no chance after death means that it is impossible even for God to give it. You see, I preach to you tonight no magic. Yes, I preach miracle.

I preach no magic. God offers us his salvation in Christ. He offers it freely.

It cost him the death of his own son. But it's a relationship he's offering, a one-to-one relationship. If we want that relationship, we may receive it, we may receive Christ personally through an act of our will and faith, but there is one thing that God will never do because he loves us too much to do it.

He will never force us and overwhelm our own decision and crush our own personality and make us receive Christ for if he took away our free choice, then we should cease to be humans and become simple machines. And God loves every man and woman too much to turn them from being human beings into mere machines. Christ indicates that time is the period when we have the opportunity to change, the opportunity to decide.

If I decide to say no to Christ, to keep my distance from God, and I die like that, there is no magic. God has no fairy wands. As a man dies, so shall he be eternally.

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