

# Between Death and Resurrection - Part 1

by David Pawson

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*David Pawson explores the biblical understanding of death, the afterlife, and the distinction between paradise and prison in his sermon on the interval between death and resurrection.*

**Duration:** 29:37

**Topics:** "Resurrection"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by acknowledging that each person in the congregation is at a different stage in their spiritual journey and has different experiences, questions, problems, and fears. The speaker then prays that everyone will receive a word from heaven during the service that will help them live with faith and expectancy. The sermon focuses on the topic of life after death, using the story of the rich man and Lazarus from Luke 16 as a basis. The speaker emphasizes that Christianity believes in the resurrection of the body and that God saves the whole person, not just their spirit. The sermon concludes with the question of what will happen to believers in the interval between death and resurrection, and the speaker poses questions about consciousness, location, and experiences during this interval.

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## Transcript

Now we're going to read from Luke's Gospel, chapter 16, if you care to follow it. Verse 19, a passage in which Jesus said more about than anywhere else in all his teaching. It's in the form of a story or a parable, but it's true to life and the afterlife.

Verse 19 of Luke's Gospel, chapter 16. There was a rich man who was close to Abraham, and at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, who desired to be fed. Moreover, the dogs came and licked his flesh, and was carried by the angels to Jerusalem.

And the rich man also died and was buried. And in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus in his arms. And he called out, Father Abraham, have mercy upon me and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water, and for I'm in anguish in this flame.

But Abraham said, Son, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things. But now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. And besides all this, between us and you, a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.

And he said, Then I beg you, Father, to send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment. But Abraham said, They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them. And he said, No, Father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.

And he said to them, If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead. Let us pray. Our loving Heavenly Father, we are dealing with serious subjects, and we are very conscious of how much we need the aid of the open minds, neither exaggerating nor avoiding what you have revealed as true of the future.

We pray, O Lord, that we may be ready and willing to hear whatever you have to say to us. We pray for the gift of discernment, that we may be able to recognize when human words come as your word, and when they do not. We thank you for revealing to us enough, all that we need to know to prepare.

We thank you that you have hidden so much from us, so that we do not become so obsessed or preoccupied with the future, that we become useless in the present. And we ask again this morning that you will meet the need of each one of us. We are amazed at the way in which you do this in a service like this.

Each of us is at a different stage in the road. Each of us has had different experience of life. We have different questions, different problems, different fears.

But we pray that somewhere in this morning's service, every one of us may have a word that comes straight into our hearts from heaven itself, by which we will be able to live, and by which we can face the future without fear, but with a strong faith and expectancy. And we ask this in the name of him who rose from the dead, conquered death, brought life and immortality, and brought a living hope into our hearts, even Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

to a man. And if man is only a body, then I've described the whole thing. He has ceased to be.

You will never see or meet him again. If man is only a body, only a physical creature, if all that I think and feel and do is the result of my physical body, then I have already answered but the bible is quite emphatic that man is very much more than indeed that the body is almost a secondary part of him. The bible describes the human body in terms of a tent in which the real person lives, a tabernacle.

It also describes the body as a suit of clothes worn by the real person. And so Paul, for example, talks very confidently and without fear of the day when he will no longer live in this tent or this suit of clothes. And so he is not disturbed.

I remember walking past a cemetery with a Christian man whose parents I knew lay in the cemetery, or whose parents' bodies lay there, and he said, you know, I just think of their bodies as overcoats. They are not in there. And in fact, once you can see that a cemetery is no more than a cloakroom, you are on your way to getting the right view towards death.

A cemetery is a cloakroom where we put aside the old clothes we've worn for whatever it has been, 70 or by reason of strength 80 years. And so the bible really emphatically states that the real person is not the body, however intimately the body has been connected with the real person. The body is the tent, the suit of clothes which we, a dear old Christian was asked by a minister, how are you? I'm fine.

And he was just stating what the New Testament's decaying, giving as being renewed every day. Christian point of view, the outside may, the inside should be all the time being renewed. In this we are quite different from all animals, and completely different, and if man is simply the product of an evolutionary process, man is a unique combination of the physical and the spiritual.

The meaning of death for man is not annihilation, it is not oblivion, it is not the end of that man, it is to a man when he dies. And the answer is an answer that no doctor or scientist could give you. The answer is, when a man dies, it is the moment of separation between his body and spirit.

That is what we understand by death. The moment when two things that have been intimately linked together, so close that you can't think of them apart, having never known them apart, they spring apart and become two separate things. This then is the meaning of death.

And it's very interesting that even in popular speech, people recognize this, somebody says to me recently, oh it is hard keeping body and soul together these days. Now what does she mean? She means precisely what she says. Keeping those two parts together is life.

Death is when they separate, and so living is keeping body and soul together. Take another saying, people talk about don't give up the ghost yet. What do they mean? They mean precisely the same thing.

Don't so expect death that you allow your spirit to escape your body now. And the very dot dot or dash dash dash, no which is it, dot dot dot dash dash dash, is precisely keep our souls in our bodies, keep them together, save our souls, even though it is the body that is in peril. Now the Bible puts it as simply as that, and this is what, for example, the book of Ecclesiastes says about death, defining it.

Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return to the God who gave it. Death is separation between these two things. We know what happens to the body, it came from the dust of the earth, there is not a particle that cannot be found in the crust of the earth somewhere, and it goes back to that, came from that dust thou art, and to dust thou shalt return.

If you rub your hands together and go on rubbing, you can produce on a sheet of white paper a little pile of grey dust, the dead cells of your skin. And you can look at that dust and say that is a little bit of my body going back to where it came from. Now that is what happened to the body, we know that.

But the question I am concerned with this morning is, what happened? James, in the New Testament, lest you think that I am entirely relying on the Old Testament teaching this morning, says the body without the spirit is dead. In other words, that is precisely what constitutes death. The body is now without the spirit, the two have been separated.

I think it is very interesting that when Jesus died, he virtually told us the same thing. His body was near the end of its earthly life after 33 years and hours of torture. What did he say to God in the last moment of his life? He did not say, into thy hands I commit myself, or into thy hands I commit my body.

He said, into thy hands he gave up the spiritual part of him, he gave to God, Joseph's Now this idea fits the ancient Greek philosophy. Those who do believe in life after death, that that is not the final, it is only a temporary, that in fact there is coming a day when body and soul, and this is what is meant by the word resurrection, which only Christians use. The Greeks, if they had stood to recite their, in other words, after Jesus, he brought body and soul in one case, but he proved that he was with each other even after the decay.

And when Jesus said, in the Middle East climate, she was perfectly right to say, it just isn't fit to open by this time. She said it in more direct language than that. And Jesus said, open the tomb.

I am the resurrection and the life. I have the power to bring body and soul together, even after corruption has set in. But we supremely believe in this possibility of body and soul being reunited again because of Easter, because Jesus himself was reunited three days and three nights after he had said, this is the heart of our Christian faith.

And even some Christians find it difficult to believe, and the world finds it impossible. When he came back from the dead, Jesus said, look, I am, he had been a spirit for three days and three nights, but he said emphatically after his resurrection, I, such as you see I have come, and they believe that we, people that have, that makes heaven a state of soul. And that is why Archbishop William, Christianity is the most materialist in the resurrection.

In other words, when God saves a person, he doesn't just say, and make the whole of them what he intended them to be. Now I come to the subject this morning, which may, for Jesus Christ, there is an interval, long or short, during which we will be as Jesus was. And the big question rises, what will it be like? What will happen to us in the interval? Will we be unconscious or awake? Where will we be? What will we be doing? Now this is the kind of question I want to tackle this morning.

Now the interval for our Lord was three days, and Christians take to say that he was in heaven. And one of the phrases in the Apostles' Creed, which most Christians have accepted and used as a fair summary of biblical teaching, says he descended into Hades. By the way, the word hell was an English alteration, and it should never have got in, and it's one of the most misleading things that could be said.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, buried, descended into Hades. And the word Hades is not the word hell, and shouldn't be confused with it. It's not necessarily a bad word, or a bad place, or a bad state.

It is a word that's the realm of departed spirits. That's all it means. It means wherever departed spirits are, and whatever they are doing, that is what the Bible refers to in the New Testament in the Greek language as Hades, but in the Old Testament in the Hebrew language, Sheol.

And if you read the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, which is, I think, the best we have available, you'll find that throughout the Old Testament, Sheol is the word used, and in the New Testament, Hades. And though the Apostles crucified Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, buried, he descended into Hades. The third day he rose again, and he ascended into heaven.

And the word heaven is kept for the bodily, and I think it would clarify a lot of our thinking that he has prepared. Are there any hints as to what it is like, and what was happening in Hades when Jesus went there? He died, he became a disembodied spirit for three days and three nights. Well now, the first clue lies in something he said to a dying thief.

A dying thief said, Lord, remember me in that future day when you get your kingdom. He's thinking of a day way in the future, and he believes that Jesus is the Christ and can get people into the kingdom of heaven at the end of history. And he says, Lord, when that happens, could you get me? Could you take me with you into it? Could you remember me? And our Lord says, I'll do more than that.

I'll promise you something now, today. Now you see what a wonderful reply it was. Lord, when you come in your kingdom in the distant future, whenever it is, could I be in it? And Jesus said, today, I can comfort you with something right now.

And this means, of course, that you don't need to limit the comfort that is given to Christians when they die, to things that are in the distant future. You can say some things about the interval which are enough to make them look forward to it. And what Jesus said to the dying thief was, today, we shall be together in paradise.

He didn't use the word heaven, and our Lord was always careful in his use of words, lest he cause misunderstanding. And he deliberately used the word paradise. Now that's a very interesting word.

It's a Persian word. It means essentially a garden, and it means particularly a king's garden. If you think of the garden outside Buckingham Palace, with that high wall around, which you may or may not have been in.

I haven't, and I don't suppose most of you have. You may have seen it from the top of a bus, and that may be the nearest most of us get to it. But there it is.

That is Her Majesty's paradise. That's what the word means. It's her private garden.

And anyone can go into it who is invited by the Queen. But you must wait for that invitation. If you walk with her in her garden, it is by her invitation, her grace and favour.

And paradise in the Bible, which incidentally is also used of the Garden of Eden, and pops up again at the end of the Bible in the Garden City, refers to the king's garden. Now you notice that the garden is not the palace. The garden is not the father's house.

The garden is not a place of rooms. And when our Lord talked about his father's house and many rooms, he is quite clearly referring to the distant future, because he said, and then you can come with me to the father's house. But what he's saying to the thief is this.

If I can't take you now into the father's house, I can take you into the king's garden, and I'll walk with you in the garden. We'll be together. Now that's one clue that begins to tell us that in a sense the interval is much nearer to the king's garden.

As it were, one could almost say the three stages like this. Stage number one is to be on the top of a bus going through London and catching a glimpse of Buckingham Palace in the distance. That is the life we enjoy here.

Stage two is to get inside the garden, nearer still, and walk with the king. And stage three is to get right inside the palace itself. And if you think of it like that, you'll realise that paradise, especially because we shall be walking in such close fellowship with the king.

Now in the olden days, and still today in some areas, a palace, which is not the palace itself, it is a prison. And it's very interesting that there are hints, also more than hints, in the New Testament that in the interval there is not only a garden but a prison. One of the most extraordinary statements made, which is there in the Bible and on which the Apostles' Creed builds, is a statement by Peter, the big fisherman, to the effect that when Jesus died, he was dead in the flesh but alive in the spirit, and went and preached to the spirits

in prison.

And we're told particularly which ones he went and preached to, which is very important. He went and preached to the spirits of those who had been drowned in the flood of Noah. Those who deny the historicity of the flood of Noah are left with a problem here, because these are the people Jesus went and preached to between his death and resurrection.

But you notice they are said to be in prison, not in the garden. There is this other place. I'll come back to this strange statement in a moment, but can you sense already that the Bible is saying that even though heaven and hell are not entered at death, there is already in the interval a distinguishing between two conditions, conditions of spirits rather than bodies.

And one condition is likened to a garden, and the other is likened to a prison, and both belong to the King. Now it is this picture on which the rest of the New Testament seems to build. It is a picture, and we must accept it as a picture, and we cannot begin to imagine what either is like in detail or in fact.

But if you think of a prison and if you think of a garden, you're getting the right feel of it. Now take the prison first, because I always prefer to get that out of the way first and then go on to the garden and finish. But let's take the prison first.

Very little is said. It will be a place of segregation. That is what going to prison means.

It's not the prison diet or anything that happens there, it is that you are shut up. Shut up. That's the meaning of prison.

Judas will be there. It's said that when Judas hanged himself, what happened to him? He went to his own place. And this is clearly the place.

Some of the angels will be there, and indeed we're told twice in the New Testament that God has already put some of the angels in custody until the day of the great trial of both angels and men. There will be many other people there. The first thief will be in the garden, so that while it is a place of segregation, that doesn't mean there won't be plenty of people there.

It does mean, excuse me, that it will be segregation from God and from God's people. And whether we understand it or not, that's the worst kind of segregation. Some people in this world are perfectly happy to live without God and to get as far from God's people as they can.

They don't like Christians and they don't like the Christ whom they worship. Well, quite frankly, they will get their dearest wish. Immediately they die, but they will begin to realize just how much they will miss both.

There is also suffering, and it would be wrong of me if I didn't say it will be mental suffering, that memory will still be active and regret will be one of the most awful things.

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