

## 122 – Resting with our fathers

In a couple of weeks, I'll be traveling to Pittsburgh, PA, where my mother lived with my sister and her family for about 2½ years, and then to Cleveland, Ohio, where my sisters and I grew up. The purpose of the trip is to honor my mother, who died less than a week ago, and the Lord gave me a eulogy to deliver at memorial services in P-Burgh and at the church she attended, and at the church in Cleveland where she was a member from 1954, and where her ashes will be interred next to my dad's, in this massive cathedral in the cultural heart of the city.

I have what to many, especially Christians, may be a unique and even alarming perspective on death, gleaned from the scriptures, of course, that I invite you to consider with me tonight. Before we begin, however, I'd like to share with you what to me is one of the sweetest insights that the Lord ever showed me, after the death of a very dear friend several years ago:

Margorie died leaving behind a husband of more than 50 years, three grown children and six grandchildren. She and her husband had known each other since childhood, and were boyfriend and girlfriend from the age of 12. At her burial, dozens of sad and tearful mourners gathered for the funeral. Some of us flew in from various areas of the country to pay respects to the family. It was a beautiful, warm, sunny, breezy spring day, as we waited near the graveside for the family to arrive from the church where the funeral had been held. Three friends stood with me, remembering Margorie's life and her influence on each of us, when it struck me suddenly, "**She isn't dead!** I just can't see her with my physical eyes! I can't reach out with my physical hand and touch hers. I can't hear her voice with my physical ears. I can't have another conversation with her here in this physical sphere." Getting more excited by the minute, I continued, "I can see her and hear her in here," as I patted my chest over my heart. "Anytime I want, I can remember her with as much clarity as if she were standing here. **She's alive in here!**" Again, I gestured over my heart. "She's only dead out

here,” I said as I swept my hand in a broad gesture to include everything around me. Finally, I said, “As long as I’m alive, she will be too!” I savored the memories that popped in and out of my mind as I spoke. It was exciting to have such a clear and life-giving realization at that moment with the friends standing around me. I asked them, “Why is there such grief at the death of a loved one? Who is the grief for?” I followed up the question with this: “Any grief must be for us. It can’t be for Margorie – she’s past caring!”

In that moment, my perception of death changed, and it had no sting. Grief changed to joyful calm and peace, and Margorie was *more* alive to me in my memory than she was when I saw her a few short months earlier. In my memory she was whole, healthy and happy. That’s how she “*lives*” today!

Let me draw our attention now to the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Corinthians:

1 Corinthians 15:54-57

***“Now, whenever this corruptible should be putting on incorruption and this mortal should be putting on immortality, then shall come to pass the word which is written,***

***Swallowed up was Death by Victory.  
Where, O Death, is your victory?  
Where, O Death, is your sting?***

***Now the sting of Death is sin, yet the power of sin is the law. Now thanks be to God, Who is giving us the victory [that is the victory over both THE sin and THE death], through our Lord Jesus Christ.”***

Actually, Paul misquoted the Prophet, Hosea, in this passage from 1 Corinthians 15! He wrote, ***“Where, O Death, is your victory? Where, O Death, is your sting?”*** Here’s the Hosea passage from the ESV:

### **Hosea 13:14**

Shall I ransom them from the power of Sheol? Shall I redeem them from Death? O Death, where are your plagues? O Sheol, where is your **sting**?

The Lord showed me that for my friend, Margorie – and now for my mother, all she will know is that she closed her eyes in a perishable human body, and opened them again, this time in the victory of an incorruptible, immortal body, standing in the presence of the Lord! No awareness of time or place. No awareness at all, because the soul dies. Preachers often refer to the soul as immortal, but there is no scriptural basis for that belief. There is, however, copious scriptural basis to teach and declare the entrance into immortality by members of Christ's body, either out from among the dead or out from among the living, upon his return:

#### **1 Corinthians 15:51-53**

***"Lo! a secret to you am I telling! We all, indeed, shall not be put to repose, yet we all shall be changed, in an instant, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump. For He will be trumpeting, and the dead will be roused incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal put on immortality."***

#### **1 Thessalonians 4:16-18**

***"...for the Lord Himself will be descending from heaven with a shout of command, with the voice of the Chief Messenger, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ shall be rising first. Thereupon we, the living who are surviving, shall at the same time be snatched away together with them in clouds, to meet the Lord in the air. And thus shall we always be together with the Lord. So that, console one another with these words."***

When Paul writes, in 1 Corinthians 15, "**We all, indeed, shall not be put to repose,**" other versions read, "**we shall not all sleep,**" and the CJB reads, "**not all of us will die,**" because **repose** and **death** are synonymous in the scriptures.

Perhaps we could regard those we've known and loved, who are no longer present with us in their physical bodies, as simply sleeping. That is after all, how the scriptures describe death:

**John 11:11-14**

*Jesus said, "Lazarus, our friend, has found repose, but I am going that I should be awakening him out of sleep."*

*"The disciples, then, said to Him, 'Lord, if he has repose, he shall be saved.' Now Jesus had made a declaration concerning his death, yet they suppose that He is saying it concerning the repose of sleep. Jesus, then, said to them with boldness then, 'Lazarus died.'"*

When we sleep, do we have *any* concept of time, before we awaken? According to the scriptures, in death there *is* no awareness whatsoever. So, upon awakening from "***repose***," we will have no concept of the time we slept! One second flows into the next.

Every religion has manufactured beliefs that make death into another kind of life in another location. Even some of the imagery of the grave or the "***unseen***" ("***Sheol***" or "***Sh'ol***") in the Old Testament scriptures, appears to give the impression of an awareness that "lives" on beyond death; for example:

**Ezekiel 26:20**

*"...then I will bring you down with those who descend to the pit, to the people of long ago, and make you live in underworld places like those who were ruined long ago, with those who descend to the pit, so that you will be uninhabited when I give glory to the land of the living."*

Poetic imagery must be separated from instruction within God's word. This is as important as distinguishing an accurate roadmap from a tour guide that has wildly exaggerated proportions. Neither the writers of the scriptures, nor those about whom they wrote, from Genesis to Revelation, had any misunderstanding or confusion about what death is or their destinations upon dying. To them, it was this simple:

1) The spirit returns to God.

***“...the spirit returns to God, Who gave it.”*** (Ecclesiastes 12:7)

2) The body returns to the dirt from which it was made.

***“...you are dust, and you will return to dust.”*** (Genesis 3:19)  
***“...the dust returns to earth, as it was...”*** (Ecclesiastes 12:7)

3) The soul – our “awareness” of living – ceases.

***“For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing...because in Sh’ol, where you will go, there is neither working nor planning, neither knowledge nor wisdom.”***  
(Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10)

With few exceptions (Enoch and Elijah), everyone written about in the Hebrew Scriptures, “***expired***,” “***died***,” “***slept with his ancestors [fathers]***,” or was “***gathered to [his] ancestors***.” Here is but one example:

***“Then David slept with his ancestors and was buried in the City of David.”*** (1 Kings 2:10)

When the Septuagint Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament was being made, the Greek word “*Hades*” replaced “*Sheol*.” Both were understood to mean the grave. In fact “*Hades*” means, literally, “*un-perceived*” and is consistently translated in the **Concordant Literal** as “***unseen***” (CLNT-KC, 315). The mythology of “*hell*” was built on the words, Hades and Sheol, and persists to this day, making it appear that the dead are really living in another kind of existence, despite clear scriptures to the contrary.

The apostle Paul used “***repose***” many times to refer to those who died. We’ll look at only two examples, which make it obvious that Paul’s understanding was simple, clear and unquestionable as to the status of anyone who dies:

**1 Corinthians 15:18, 20-21**

***“Consequently those also, who are put to repose in Christ, perished... (Yet now Christ has been roused from among the dead, the Firstfruit of those who are reposing. For since, in fact, through a man came death, through a Man, also, comes the resurrection of the dead...)”***

**1 Thessalonians 4:15-16**

***“For this we are saying to you by the word of the Lord, that we, the living, who are surviving to the presence of the Lord, should by no means outstrip those who are put to repose, for the Lord Himself will be descending from heaven with a shout of command, with the voice of the Chief Messenger, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ shall be rising first...”***

Paul also wrote about, ***“the period of my dissolution....”*** (2 Timothy 4:6). The term, ***“dissolution”*** means literally ***“dissolving into different parts,”*** (Thayer, 39). Paul knew exactly what would happen when he died: his spirit would return to God, his body would decay and return to dust, and his soul would cease knowing anything until ***“the dead in Christ shall be rising.”***

Jesus' story of Lazarus in the bosom of Abraham, while a rich man was in torment in the ***“unseen”*** or ***“Hades,”*** is often used as evidence for life after death either in heaven or hell:

**Luke 16:22-23**

***“Now the poor man came to die and he is carried away by the messengers into Abraham's bosom. Now the rich man also died, and was entombed. And in the unseen, lifting up his eyes, existing in torments, he is seeing Abraham from afar and Lazarus in his bosom.”***

Jesus well knew that Hebrew traditions had become badly polluted over hundreds of years, and that ***“Abraham's bosom”*** was simply a part of Jewish mythology in His time. Judaism had become quite corrupted over the 500 year period between the end of the OT and the birth of Jesus Christ. Jesus knew

that there was no such place as the bosom of Abraham OR a place of torment, so He dispensed with the Pharisees, who constantly tried to trip him up (***“they scouted Him,”*** Luke 16:14), by using their own mythology to make the point that these religious men had failed to follow their own scriptures. Jesus knew the scriptures better than they, including those concerning Abraham’s death:

***“Then Abraham breathed his last...and he was gathered to his people.”*** (Genesis 25:8)

No sooner had Jesus dealt with the Pharisees’ foolishness than He addressed His disciples, as if looking over His shoulder at the preceding exchange with these so-called “authorities”:

***“Now He said to His disciples, ‘Incredible is it for snares not to be coming. Moreover, woe to him through whom they are coming!’”***  
(Luke 17:1)

*“Absent from the body, present with the Lord,”* is another quotation used as evidence of a “destination” for dead people other than ***“unseen.”*** This misquotation of the following scripture is quickly put to rest by the actual text. Three versions are presented here: the **Concordant Literal** (CLNT), **New American Standard** (NAS) and **King James** versions (KJV).

***“...yet we are encouraged, and are delighting rather to be away from home out of the body and to be at home with the Lord.”*** (CLNT)

***“...we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.”*** (NAS)

***“We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.”*** (KJV) (2  
Corinthians 5:8)

We may “prefer” to be with the Lord, but we are not there yet, and the scriptures are clear that resurrection is the only way for the dead to live again. The danger we continue to face, nearly 2,000 years after Christ’s resurrection, is making mythology into theology (and vice versa!).

The dead are in “**repose**” (John 11:11), where the soul “**sleeps**” and is “**unseen**,” until one of two resurrections to come (the “**former**” into Christ’s presence and the latter into the judgment before the “**great white throne**”). When the dead awaken, it will be as if no time at all has elapsed. Their last awareness before sleep will be “spliced” into the awareness in which they awaken. They will be unconscious of the passing of time. Even the second death, as much as we would do well to avoid it, is an instantaneous loss of awareness, until the consummation.

If the dead are sleeping, or reposing, then they can’t also be floating around somewhere in “Heaven,” can they? When my sister talked about our mother entering the “*pearly gates*” and my other sister talked about walking with our dad on some beach in heaven, I bit my tongue and kept my mouth shut. Christians seem to have constructed a mythical destination for dead people by freely misappropriating the scriptures in the Apostle John’s “Revelation,” which refer to the New Jerusalem:

**Revelation 21:1-2, 9-11, 21**

1 And I perceived a new heaven and a new earth, for the former heaven and the former earth pass away, and the sea is no more.

2 And I perceived the holy city, new Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.

...

9 And one of the seven messengers who have the seven bowls brimming with the last seven calamities came, and he speaks with me, saying, "Hither! I shall be showing you the bride, the wife of the Lambkin."

10 And he carries me away, in spirit, on a mountain, huge and high, and shows me the holy city, Jerusalem, as it is descending out of heaven from God,

11 having the glory from God.

...

21 And the twelve portals are twelve pearls. Each one of the portals was respectively of one pearl. And the square of the city is gold, clear as translucent glass.



## **Revelation 22:15**

15 Outside are curs, and enchanter, and paramours, and murderers, and idolaters, and everyone fabricating and fondling falsehood.

Perhaps it is of no consequence, really, how we perceive what Christians call Heaven. Maybe it doesn't matter that we know that the dead are sleeping and unaware, knowing nothing until the Day of the Lord or until the Great White Throne. Maybe it's unimportant that the only ascent of anyone into a celestial realm mentioned in the scriptures is at the last trumpet and the Lord's own shout of command that raises the dead in Christ and lifts those who are His at His coming, into the air in changed bodies of glory like His own, as Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 4. That's the only mention in the scriptures of anyone "going to heaven."

What does it matter? Maybe it doesn't, but, to me, it eliminates confusion that I believe lurks in the minds of people who love God but have a tough time understanding Him, not because He's not understandable but because the teachings of the Christian church are conflicting and confusing.

In Tennessee, Barbara and I attended a home church meeting. We arrived in time to hear a young man, very earnestly curious and wanting so badly to understand the Bible, as the guest pastor who was speaking that weekend, "If we're already in heaven after we die, why do we have to come back into the grave and be resurrected back into heaven when the Lord returns? Why don't we just stay in Heaven?"

Isn't that a logical and reasonable question? The pastor's response was so incongruent, incomprehensible and unsupportable by the scriptures that I lost all respect for him. However, I made note that if this young man had such a reasonable question, clearly because he couldn't reconcile the apparent confusion in the scriptures, how many others may be thrown into confusion, thinking that God Himself is nonsensical?

Maybe tonight's LUTS is simply a witness to those who may hear the recording of this study by recording in the future. I believe that God gave me the eulogy for my mother as a witness to my family and my mother's friends in P-Burgh and Cleveland when I testify to her repose, as she rests with HER fathers.

"Now to Him Who is able to do superexcessively above all that we are requesting or apprehending, according to the power that is operating in us, to Him be glory in the ecclesia and in Christ Jesus for all the generations of the eon of the eons! Amen!" (Eph. 3:20-21)

"The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you: the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace." (Numbers 6:24-26)