

All Saints 2011 2 Cor 5 : 1- 10 (Revelation 5:6 -- 14)

Introduction to First Reading

Our first reading is one of those set in our Essential 100 Bible passages. It complements today's theme as we think about those Christians who have died, and our future home with them in heaven.

Introduction to Second Reading

We are due to begin our look at the final book of the Bible next week -- the book of Revelation -- a difficult book. But here we see part of St John's vision -- John writing in picture language of the martyrs and saints who have died and are now in God's presence.

Sermon -- what happens after death

All Saints (All Hallows), is the Christian festival when we remember Christians down through the ages who have died and passed from this world into the next.

So what better time to review what Christians believe happens to us -- and to others -- after death. what of us survives.

(Mark's Essay ; I am using PowerPoint to make this easier)

1. The Soul (OHP body and soul)

First, Christians believe that we are more than just a physical body and a physical brain.

OHP Illustrating

We believe that we also have a soul -- which contains all that we really are as persons -- (bit vague -- our consciousness, our minds).

Created with our bodies (which can be viewed as the vehicles we use) and, continues to exist when our bodies die.

'death is a temporary cessation of bodily life and a separation of the soul from the body.

So what happens to us - that is these souls of ours?

2. Time Zones

OHP Illustrating :Present time --> Return of Christ --> Our final state (which we shall come to later).

What of those who die now - before the return of Christ?

3. The Intermediate State OHP - add to

Reference - the bidding prayer, said each year at the carol festival of King's College, Cambridge, declares, 'Lastly let us remember before God all those who rejoice with us, but upon another shore and in a greater light.'

The mainstream assumption among theologians is that upon death, the souls of believers go to a place where there is some conscious ability to enjoy fellowship with God and to worship him. **OHP Part 2**

Based upon Jesus' words to the thief on the cross, '*today you will be with me in Paradise*' (Lk 23:43), as well as Paul's wish to be '*away from the body and at home with the Lord*' (2 Cor 5:8).

There is other biblical evidence that suggests that the souls of the dead may exist in an intermediate state of consciousness, and on occasion have been summoned back to the world of the living.

Throughout history, people have recorded sightings of ghosts or felt the presence of dead relatives, and not all of these appear as malevolent as demonic manifestations.

Jesus disciples assumed Jesus to be a ghost when he walked on the water (Mt 14:26; Mk 6:49), which suggests that the idea was not inconceivable to Jews. Furthermore, when he first appeared to them after the resurrection, Jesus takes pains to convince them that he is not a ghost, saying ' a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have' (Lk 24:39). Interestingly Jesus does not refute the existence of ghosts here.

There are also more specific Bible passages prohibiting the consulting of spirits from the dead (Dt 18:11). Saul is judged for consulting Samuel in this manner, suggests that the narrator believed that the practice of necromancy was effective.

In addition to the biblical material, accounts from individuals who claim to have died and been brought back to life usually record a conscious awareness of existence, often in an astral body in a domain of light. It is difficult to attribute all of these to medical causes.

Sum - intermediate state until the return of Christ. The soul continuing.

4. The Final State

The soul may conceivably exist for a period of time independently of the body, but it is not the destiny of the Christians to remain disembodied for all eternity, but rather to be bodily resurrected at the return of Christ.

Ref: The Creed

Paul describes this as a transforming process; 'What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable... It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body' (1 Cor 15:42, 44).

Beginning of final state – heaven.
(more of this when we look at the last things in Revelation next week (end E100))

5. What of the souls of unbelievers ?

Their souls survive also – but not with Christ in paradise.

It would seem that they experience some degree of conscious unease from the moment of death.

Reference Jesus' parable in Luke 16: *The Rich Man and Lazarus*
Luke 16:19 "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. 20 At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores 21 and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. 22 "The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. 23 In hell, [greek Hades] where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. 24 So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.' 25 "But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. 26 And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.' 27 "He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, 28 for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'

Explain (The fact that the rich man has brothers alive on earth during this parable implies it is chronologically before J's return. - ie - the Intermediate state – not the final "Hell" - more Greek Hades)

But beyond the intermediate state – what is the final state for unbelievers

- does the state of the man described by Jesus in the parable continue for ever ?

– Hell as many envision it?

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6. Two views of "Hell"

Christian thinkers are divided.

Some would say yes - Hell is the eternal torment...

Others - *looking deeper at the text* - suggest not. Instead, they say, that at the return of Christ, at the final judgement, then the souls of unbelievers simply cease to exist.

The first view is based partly on the assumption taken from Plato's philosophy, that your soul is. - inherently immortal. Therefore must go somewhere for rest of eternity..

But is that biblical ? Is the soul immortal?

What does Jesus say ?

Matt 10:28 Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

Matt 16:26 What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?

But what about - Revelation 14:10:-11 - which is most commonly used to support eternal hell view.: *'the smoke of their torment will rise for ever and ever. .'*

However, since Revelation is apocalyptic literature, its imagery must be interpreted carefully. The other reference to rising smoke in the bible is where Edom's total destruction is foretold: *'its smoke will rise forever. From generation to generation it will lie desolate.'* (Isaiah 34:10). It can be argued that the symbols of smoke and of burning sulphur signify the complete destruction that will come upon the unbelievers. In other literature of that time, burning sulfur signifies destruction, annihilation.

Arguments for eternal conscious torment also have to wrestle with what the Bible understands by the words 'destroy' and 'perish'. John 3:16 contrasts 'eternal life' with 'perish', which indicates that those who follow Christ will receive the prize of living forever, whereas others will by contrast cease to exist.

Conclusion - Response

Hope – There should be no fear of death for the Christian believer.

(Though grief at loss of loved ones. And fear of act of dying is understandable)