TASTING THE POWERS OF THE AGE TO COME

Catechism Two, Lesson 30

Reading: Hebrews 6:1–12

1. Where Do Our Spirits Go After We Die, To Await Resurrection Of The Body?

At death, our spirit and soul are separated from the body. The body quickly decomposes into its chemical elements, but the spirit and soul continue in conscious existence, awaiting a new body at the time of resurrection (Eccl. 12:7; Psa. 16:9–11). God is perfectly holy. He cannot tolerate sin in His presence (Hab. 1:13). For this reason He assigns the spirits of men to temporary dwelling places until the resurrection and judgment. We call this interval of time between death and resurrection “the intermediate state” because it is a time of transition and is temporary.

A. Before the atonement of Christ, the spirits of all men descended into the center of the earth to await resurrection.

This temporary abode for departed spirits in the center of the earth was called Sheol in Hebrew, and Hades in Greek. Both words refer to the same place. Both the righteous and the unrighteous dead went into this underworld existence, where they continued as conscious personalities (Ezek. 32:27; Isa. 14:9–11; 1 Sam. 28:14). This existence was a shadowy copy of former life, described by a Hebrew word meaning “sunken and powerless, lacking life’s vital forces.”

Sheol (or Hades) was divided into two compartments: one for the righteous called “Abraham’s Bosom” or “Paradise,” and the other a place of conscious torment for the wicked. Jesus described this division in the unseen world in His story of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31).

B. After the atonement of Christ, Paradise was transferred to heaven.

After the death, burial and resurrection of Christ completed the remission of sin, God could relocate the place of the righteous dead. He moved it to heaven, with Himself. Now when a believer dies, his spirit and soul immediately go into the presence of God. Paradise now means being present with Christ. It is a place of conscious blessing, rest and awareness of God’s presence; but it is a place of imperfection or incompleteness because the spirit yet needs a body.

And Jesus said unto him [the repentant thief], Verily I say unto thee, To day shall thou be with me in paradise (Luke 23:43).

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

2. What Did Jesus Accomplish During His Three Days In Sheol (Hades)?

It was part of God’s plan of redemption for Jesus to spend three days and nights in the heart of the earth (Matt. 12:39, 40). It was there that He demonstrated His total conquest of death. Not only did He not experience corruption Himself, but He released the spirits of the righteous dead to come with Him into His Father’s presence (Acts 2:31).

A. Jesus paved the way for us to enter directly into God’s presence at death.

Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.) (Eph. 4:8–10).

B. Jesus removed the sting of death, that we need not sorrow as those outside Christ.

O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:55–57).

But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him (1 Thess. 4:13, 14).

C. Jesus brought the gospel to those who had died before His time.

For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing … (1 Pet. 3:18–20).

D. Jesus defeated all the powers of Satan and his hosts and became Head of the Church.

Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church (Eph. 1:20–22).

E. Jesus destroyed the bondage we experience through the fear of death.

Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage (Heb. 2:14,15).

3. How Will God Resurrect The Dead?

Just as all things were originally brought into existence by God’s creative Word, so shall that which has perished be restored by His Word. The Father has given Jesus Christ the authority to make alive the dead by speaking His Word. Jesus explained this to those who questioned His healing the impotent man at the pool of Bethesda:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live. For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself (John 5:25, 26).

Three Greek verbs, most often used to talk of resurrection, add to our understanding of the process:

A. anistemi: to cause to rise; raise up; make to stand up.

We do not raise ourselves; it requires God’s intervention. Resurrection means the restoring of relationship between body, soul, and spirit, making us able to stand up as a whole person, integrated by the Word of God. All that was ever a part of us will be gathered up and we will stand before the Lord renewed by His Word.

And this is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me, I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day (John 6:39).

B. egeiro: to arouse from sleep, to awake; to recall the dead to life.

Death is not the end of existence; it is simply a transition between mortal life and immortality. It is as natural and temporary a change as lying down to sleep, and then being awakened by someone calling our name. However, through this transition we are changed. We awake to a new kind of life.

As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness (Psa. 17:15).

C. zoopoieo: to give life or make alive, to quicken; to increase life.

The creative Word of God imparts spiritual power and invigorates. Resurrection is more than restoration; it is the impartation of new and greater life. We will be endued with new and greater powers of life.

For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will (John 5:21).

4. Will Only Those “In Christ” Be Resurrected?

No. Both those ‘In Christ’ and those who have died without being reconciled to God will be physically resurrected. Death is not the end for either the believer or the unbeliever. However, the Bible does warn us of some important differences in the resurrection of those who are in Christ and those who are not.

A. What we do in this life determines the nature of our resurrection.

Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation [condemnation] (John 5:28, 29).

B. The dead in Christ will be raised at an earlier time.

For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent [precede] them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first (1 Thess. 4:15, 16).

But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years (Rev. 20:5, 6).

(Note: This thousand year period between the two resurrections is often called the millenium from the Latin word for thousand.)

C. The quality of our everlasting life will differ according to our relationship to Christ.

And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever (Dan. 12:2, 3).

D. Only those who experience spiritual resurrection during this life, will continue to share Christ’s life through eternity.

And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1).

5. How Do We Experience Foretastes Of Resurrection In This Life?

The writer to the Hebrews tells us that in laying the foundation stones and in growing to maturity, we actually experience in preview the power of the age to come. The literal translation of Hebrews 6:4, 5 reads:

For it is impossible the ones once being enlightened and tasting of the heavenly gift and becoming sharers of the Holy Spirit, and tasting the good word of God and powerful deeds of a coming age.

All of these verbs speak of firsthand experience, of knowing God for one’s self. We know Him by revelation, by receiving the Holy Spirit into our lives, and by discovering His word brings about changes in our lives. We taste of resurrection by experiencing the reality of Christ as a personal power in our own lives.

A. Physical healing is a foretaste of resurrection.

But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you (Rom. 8:11).

B. Hearing the Lord speak to us by His Spirit imparts resurrection life.

It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life (John 6:63).

C. We partake of resurrection life by faith in taking the Lord’s Supper.

As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me (John 6:57).

D. Believing God for the impossible and seeing Him perform it, prefigures resurrection.

And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sara’s womb.… (As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were (Rom. 4:19, 17).

E. We rise to walk in newness of life by sharing His resurrection through water baptism.

Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:4).

Home Study: Lessons 25–30

Name\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. Will only those who die “in Christ” be resurrected?

2. What did Jesus accomplish during His three days in the heart of the earth?

a.

b.

c.

d.

e.

3. What happens to our souls and spirits after we die?

Vocabulary:

1. Abraham’s bosom—

2. Annihilation—

3. Ascension—

4. Cremation—

5. Death—

6. Diligence—

7. Exaltation—

8. Firstfruits—

9. Glorification—

10. Hades—

11. Humiliation—

12. Personality—

13. Reincarnation—

14. Sheol—

15. Thanatos (Greek)—

16. Translation—