

Sh. 23:43

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SUBJECT: When We Go
When We Die

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WHERE WE GO WHEN WE DIE

Luke 23:43

It was a joy for me in acquiescence to a request by one of our godly deacons to prepare a message on the intermediate state - "Where We Go When We Die". It is the purpose of God, very expressly, explicitly, and emphatically revealed in the Holy Scriptures that the whole possession be redeemed; not just man's heart, spirit and soul be regenerated, born again, redeemed, ransomed, but that the whole man be saved! Not only my soul and spirit, but the house in which I live - the body or tabernacle of my soul! You find that repeated so many times in the Bible. For example, Paul refers to us who have been regenerated, born again, as having been filled with the Holy Spirit or promise (Eph. 1:13-14). We are not to worry. Having saved us, bought us, and redeemed us, God is going to keep us. He is not going to let us be lost and fall into the abyss of damnation. We have been sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest, the down payment of our inheritance until the redemption of the whole possession.

God's Complete Redemption

God is not done with us when He saves our souls and regenerates our spirits. It is the purpose of God to redeem all of us, every piece of us, every part of us, including my mind (which is fallen), my emotions (which are fallen), my

heart and soul (which are fallen), and my body (which is fallen). God will redeem all of it - the whole purchased possession! He will say it again and these are just typical passages. He will say in the incomparable eighth chapter of Romans, "For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now" (Rom. 8:22). The stars are blasted; the suns are fallen and turned to cinders; this planet earth on which we live is seared by deserts, tormented by tornadoes, hurricanes, drought, flood and injury! The whole creation, even the animal world groans and pains until now.

We, too, who have received the Holy Spirit, groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption; to wit, namely the redemption of the body. My heart has been saved, my spirit has been regenerated, but my soul lives in a mortal body of carnality, corruption, pain, illness, and finally, senility and death. But it is God's purpose not only to redeem my soul but also my body - the whole purchased possession. Christ paid for all of me when He redeemed me on the cross.

Now, it is very apparent that there is a time interval between the day when I was saved and the day when my body is redeemed. I am still captive of illness, weakness and death. My soul is redeemed but my body is not.

Now, the redemption of the body is at the great consummation of the age. At the coming of Christ, if I am still alive, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, I will be

immortalized and glorified. But, if I die before the Lord comes, these who sleep in Jesus He will raise first. It is then that the body is redeemed - at the consummation of the age.

But there is a time lapse, an interval, an interlude between the conversion of my spirit and the redemption of my body. In that time interval, what happens to us? Where do we go? How is it with us? For some, that time interval has been very long. Think of the years Adam, Abraham, or Moses have been dead. There is a long time interval in our human judgment and understanding, between the time that the man was saved and the time that his body is redeemed - an interval between the time he goes to be with the Lord and the time his body is raised from the dead. This is called the intermediate state.

If I die in that interval of time between the conversion of my spirit and the resurrection of my body, I am still alive; I am still conscious; I am still filled with intentus life. Is such a thing possible that a spirit lives and is cognizant, knowledgable, sensitive, alive? Yes, because God is Spirit and has volition, personality, will love, feeling, life, ableness, and power. God is Spirit and He is alive. In Hebrews, the angels are described as "ministering spirits" sent to encourage and help us who are the inheritors of salvation (Heb. 1:14). Angels are spirits and they are alive. They have names;

they go on missions; they worship before God. They do His service in heaven and on earth. When I am separated from this body, I am still alive, and I have intentus being.

I am also in that separation what you call death. I am with Christ. It is an entrance into the full presence of the Lord. In a beautiful, meaningful passage (II Cor. 5), Paul is talking about the dissolution of this tabernacle, that when a man dies his spirit goes to be with the Lord. In the discussion he says, if I could put it in language that we use today, that the soul abhors disimbodiment as nature abhors a vacuum. Not that we would be unclothed or disim-bodied, but clothed upon that mortality might be swallowed up of life. Between a time that a man dies and the time that he has this resurrected bodh, here is an interval. So, speaking of that he says that even though for that time period we are disim-bodied, "we are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord".

In II Corinthians 5, Paul uses two beautiful Greek words - ecdēmeo and endēmeo. Ecdēmeo is translated here we would love rather to be absent from the body and be present with the Lord; to be away from home, to be on a far journey, to be absent from the body.- Ecdēmeo regards the body. Endēmeo is translated here in the presence of the Lord. Endēmeo regards our Lord. That is why the apostle, incarcerated, facing

execution and death, avows "for to me to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21). He was not losing Him, but gaining Him. He was not shut out from His presence, but into His presence. Ecdēmeo is away from the body, but endēmeo is present or at home with the Lord.

The Intermediate State

In that intermediate state, if the Lord delays His coming, we are introduced into Paradise. The word Paradise is used three times in the New Testament and it is an old Persian word referring to a park or beautiful place. The first time it is used is on the cross when the Lord said to the repentant malefactor, "Today thou shalt be with me in Paradise". The malefactor almost certainly was a Jew and a secessionist, an insurrectionist, and as such, was being crucified by the Roman government. When he said to the Lord Jesus, dying by his side, "Lord, when Thou comest into Thy Kingdom, remember me", almost certainly, it is a Messianic Kingdom yet to come that the malefactor had in mind. The Lord said now is the salvation of God, the gift of eternal life and Messianic Glory - not some tomorrow, not some far off day, but now! The Greek word is semēron. This day thou shalt be with me in Paradise - today, now!

The second time the word paradise is used is in II Corinthians 12. The apostle Paul is writing of himself. Though

in the third person, he says, "I know a man, about fourteen years ago, who was raptured into the third heaven." In the next verse, (verse 4), he says, "I know such a man who was caught up in to Paradise." Both times, he is referring to the same event and to himself. He calls Paradise the third heaven. The first heaven is where the birds and the clouds go by. The second heaven is the milky way, the Siberial spheres, the stars of the firmament. The third heaven is where Jesus and the saints are, which is called Paradise.

The third time the word Paradise is used is in Revelation 2 when the sainted seer is addressing the church at Ephesus. The Lord says to the church at Ephesus, "he that overcome will I grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God." That tells us where it is. John says, "And I saw a pure river of the water of life clear as crystal, flowing out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it and on either side of the river was there the tree of life and the leaves are for the healing of the people" (Rev. 22). John saw that tree of life in the New Jerusalem, in the City of God that someday shall come down out of heaven, and Jesus said that tree of life is in Paradise. Paradise is the beautiful City of God, the New Jerusalem, where these go, where they are translated, where they are - ecdēmeo, from the body and endēmeo, with the Lord!

The scriptures say other things about Paradise. They say that we are at rest in quietness and in blessedness there.

Lazarus was the poor, wretched beggar who was laid at the door of Dives, hoping for crumbs that fell from the table. When he died he was carried into Abraham's bosom, another name for Paradise. There he was comforted. The only happiness that that wretched beggar knew was when the dogs came and licked his sores. He was living a life of penury, want, need, hunger and illness, but Jesus said he is comforted in Abraham's bosom, in Paradise, in the City of our God. "And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord" (Rev. 14:13). On, we say, how unhappy he has died; how sad this funeral service, and how wretched a fortune that these are in the cemetery! That is what we say, but God does not say that. God says, 'Write, blessed are the dead who die in the Lord. Yea, saith the spirit, that they may rest from their labors and their works do follow them.'

Revelation 6 tells us when the fifth seal was opened, he saw the souls of those who had laid down their lives for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. He saw them underneath the altar, that altar where the blood was poured out and sacrificed. Blood has a voice which cries unto God, for the blood of Abel cried unto God from the ground. These souls, these lives that have been poured out under the altar as a sacrifice, they cried to God, "How long, O Lord?" The Lord clothed them with white garments, beautiful robes of

glistening, celestial purity, and God said, "Wait, rest until the consummation of the age, until the great Judgment Day. Wait." This is the ecdēmeo - from the body, and the endēmeo - with Christ in Paradise, in the City of God, not only my spirit, but my body also, waiting for the redemption of the whole purchased possession.

Recognition of Immortality

What is it like if I am in the presence of the Lord, disembodied, waiting for the resurrection? Am I known? Does God know me? Do we know each other? Is the life a real life? The apostle writes in the famous and incomparably beautiful book of Corinthians, "Now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face, now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known" (I Cor. 13). We are going to take that word "know" and translate it literally, just exactly as the word means. The word "know" is ginosco. Epiginosco means to know by experience. It could be translated "recognize". For example, as Jesus walked along with the two disciples on the way to Emmaus, he says, "Their eyes were holden that they should not epiginosco, recognize or know him" (Luke 24:16).

The word translated here is "know". Let us say recognize, for that is exactly what it means. The Lord sat down with those two disciples in Emmaus for suppertime, at eventide, that in the saying of the blessing their eyes were opened and

they epiginosco, recognized, him (Luke 24:31).

Now, let us keep the word. That is the one that he uses here. "I know in part, but then shall I know even as also I am known", or, I am recognized. I will recognize as God recognizes me, as fully, as beautifully, and as wonderfully. Dr. A. N. Hall, my illustrious predecessor, who for 28 years was pastor at the church in Muskogee and upon whose death I was called as undershepherd, once said, "People ask me will we know one another in heaven and I reply, 'My brother, we will not really know each other until we get to heaven!'" Even as God recognizes us and we recognize Him shall we recognize and know each other. It is annihilation if I am not known, If I am not I, if you are not you; if you do not have a name and you are not known! You might as well not be raised from the dead if you are not known, if you are not an identity, if you are a nothing, a nameless something! It is being recognized, being known, being you as you and I as I, that makes life real. There is no real life without it. Gabriel will say, "I am Gabriel who stands in the presence of God." Jesus will say, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest, Saul."

In the last chapter of the Revelation, he will say, "I, Jesus, have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches." The Lord will say, "I call my own sheep by name." A number? No! A glob? No! You are somebody and I am somebody. He knows my name. He speaks to me and I am some-

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body in His sight, in His presence. He knows me, and without that mutuality of recognition there is no complete life. A naturalist can know everything in the earth. The rocks and the reefs, the mountains, the prairies, the fields, the continents, the oceans, even the insects and the animals. A naturalist could know them all, but they do not know him. They do not respond. They are passive and that is not life.

When God saw the man that He made living alone (even in the Paradise of Eden), He said, "It is not good." He made for him a helpmate, one like him to talk to him, to be with him, to be a companion, to love him, and that completed the man that he made. So it is with our life, if we do not know each other, and God does not know us, and I do not have a name, if I am not I, and you are not you, then immortality, heaven, and paradise are meaningless! It is another word for annihilation. It is knowing each other that makes life full and rich and complete.

One of the craziest things I ever heard was when I was speaking at a conference in California. The man who spoke before my address was Dr. Charles Allen, who is pastor of the First Methodist Church in Houston. Dr. Allen is one of the most interesting speakers to whom I ever listened. He said, "A man came up to me and asked, 'Dr. Allen, who is the greatest President that the United States ever had?'" Dr. Allen replied,

"Lyndon Baines Johnson." The man was amazed. "You mean above Washington, Lincoln and all the great presidents of the United States, you think L.B.J. is the greatest President the United States ever had?" Dr. Allen said, "I certainly do." The man said in astonishment, "Well, what makes you think that L.B.J. is the greatest President the United States ever had?" He said, "Because one day he walked up to me out of the crowd and extended his hand and said, 'Hello there, Charles Allen. How are you getting along?'" Dr. Allen replied, "He is the only president of the United States who ever came up to me and says, 'Charles Allen, how are you getting along?'" He has a point! He knows me and he calls me by my name! Without that nomenclature, that knowledge, that recognition, Paradise is annihilation. It is the knowing, the recognition, the being you and I that makes it livable, glorious, heavenly, makes it life.

I do not have time to go through the scriptures. Oh, how we are encouraged in that Saul knew Samuel the minute that he saw him. His spirit raised, brought back. He recognized him at a glance. David said, "My child that is dead cannot come to me, but I can go to him." The three disciples on the top of the Mount of Transfiguration, intuitively knew Elijah and Moses. They had never seen them in their lives. They had been dead 1,014 years. The Lord said to Mary and Martha, "Thy brother shall rise again." Our brother? Yes, not some nonentity, nameless someone, but thy brother shall rise again. He said to the

thief dying by His side, "Today, thou shalt be with me in Paradise." Presupposing recognition. I know you, you know me. We will be together in Paradise. The Lord was known by His human recognitions, tone of voice, the way He folded a napkin, the way He said a blessing at a table. We shall know each other in Glory. Oh, how beautifully have we seen that in the lives of these whom we have loved and lost for just awhile.

When Lottie Moon was dying, clasping and unclasping her hands in Chinese recognition she called the name of her Pingtu Christians. Some of them had been dead for forty years. When my mother came to the end of the way, after a long illness of almost seven years as an invalid, stricken down, destroyed by a terrible cerebral hemorrhage, seated by her side my mother said to me, "Son, have you seen my father?" I said, "Why no, mother, he has been dead over fifty years." "Oh, son, he is here. Son, have you seen my mother?" "No mother, I have not seen her. Well, son, you must see them. They are here. Have you seen brother Joe?" I said, "Brother Joe died fifty years before I was born. No mother, I have not see brother Joe." "Son, you must be sure to see them. They are here." I replied, "Well mother, what makes you think they are here?" She said, "I have seen them. They have visited with me. Son, before you go back to Dallas, you must visit my mother and father. You must see them." I put my arms around her shoulders and I said, "Do not

worry, mother, I will see them. I will see them." What do you think of that? Just before a translation, how many times have I heard people say to me, and my sainted father said it, "Look, look, I see the face of Jesus." How many times have these who stand at the grave of someone they have loved and they have said, "You know, just before she died, (before he died), she, (he), looked up and said, 'There is mother, there is father, there is husband, there is wife, there is our precious child.'" There are little glimpses of the recognitions of immortality.

Ecdēmeo - from the body, from this house. Endēmeo - at home with the Lord, God having provided some better thing and some better place for us. Oh, the preciousness, the sweetness, and the blessedness of the Holy comfort we have in the promises of our blessed Lord, going before us to prepare a way for our coming in our day and in our time!