

# How Jesus Reached the Lost

## Lesson 2: What Happens When We Die?

A human is made up of body and soul:

- ⇒ <sup>ESV</sup> **Matthew 10:28** “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.”
- ⇒ <sup>ESV</sup> **2 Peter 1:13** I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder, <sup>14</sup> since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me.

When a human dies, his soul is separated from his body. His body decays, but his soul—and thus he himself, his *ego*, or personality—lives on. If a person trusts in Jesus for salvation, his soul will live in joy with God, awaiting the resurrection, the last judgment, and eternal life. If a person is wicked and unbelieving, his soul will live in torment, awaiting the resurrection, the last judgment, and eternal condemnation.

In 2 Cor. 5:4–8, St Paul describes the body as a “tent” in which he—that is, his mind, personality, soul, spirit...—dwells. He says that when he and believing Christians die, they will be “away from the body” (literally, “out of the house of the body”) and yet still “at home with [present with] the Lord.” These passages show clearly that the center of one’s personhood, which other passages call “the soul,” can exist separately from the body, and that at death the soul is separated from the body.

- ⇒ Regarding the little girl who had died *but Jesus raised to life* the Bible records that:  
<sup>ESV</sup> **Luke 8:55** ...her spirit returned, and she got up at once.
- ⇒ Jesus final statement from His cross:  
<sup>ESV</sup> **Luke 23:46** Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!” And having said this he breathed his last.

- ⇒ <sup>ESV</sup> **Philippians 1:23** I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart [*from this body*] and be with Christ, for that is far better. <sup>24</sup> But [*for my soul*] to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.

### What about “Soul Sleep”?

In John 11:11–14, our Lord Jesus describes the death of His friend Lazarus as “sleep.”

- ⇒ <sup>ESV</sup> **John 11:11** [Jesus] said to them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him.”

But note: the wicked who die have “no rest”:

- ⇒ <sup>ESV</sup> **Revelation 14:11** “And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name.”

Death is a “rest” or “sleep” for the godly:

- ⇒ <sup>ESV</sup> **Revelation 14:13** And I heard a voice from heaven saying, “Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.” “Blessed indeed,” says the Spirit, “that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!”

Thus, the Church calls the places where the godly are buried “cemetaries,” that is, “dormitories” or places of sleep, and the Church believes that the godly do indeed “rest in peace.”

But while the body sleeps, the soul is awake. For example, in Luke 16:19–31, the soul of the rich man in Hades prays (to no avail) that the beggar Lazarus would relieve his suffering or return to earth to warn his family. The soul of Lazarus, on the other hand, is “comforted” (v

25). Both the rich man and faithful Abraham are awake, conscious, and speaking. Scripture sometimes indicates that the departed souls are unaware of what takes place on earth:

- ⇒ Regarding King Josiah: <sup>ESV</sup> **2 Kings 22:20** “Therefore, behold, I will gather you to your fathers, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace, and your eyes shall not see all the disaster that I will bring upon this place.”
- ⇒ <sup>NIV</sup> **Isaiah 57:1** The righteous perish, and no one ponders it in his heart; devout men are taken away, and no one understands that the righteous are taken away to be spared from evil.

Yet it should not be concluded from this that they are unconscious. The soul of the rich man was not unconscious, nor was the soul of Abraham:

- ⇒ <sup>ESV</sup> **Matthew 22:31** “...have you not read what was said to you by God: <sup>32</sup> ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not God of the dead, but of the living.”

In considering “soul sleep,” however, we must distinguish between those people who affirm that the souls of the righteous are comforted and experience God’s presence and those who think that the souls of the righteous experience nothing, or worse, are obliterated. As long as the comfort of the righteous **souls** is affirmed, expressions about the dead **bodies** being asleep are not dangerous. But the view that the souls of the righteous experience nothing, or that they are dissipated or annihilated, however, are false, unscriptural views.

### Glory and Condemnation on Judgment Day

What is the last judgment all about? Scripture teaches that in heaven there are

varying degrees of glory and in hell there are varying degrees of condemnation, or judgment:

- ⇒ <sup>ESV</sup> **Matthew 10:15** “Truly, I say to you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town.”
- ⇒ <sup>ESV</sup> **John 19:11** Jesus answered [Pilate], “You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin.”

In response to the question: What Is Meant by the Degrees and Differences in Heaven? J.T. Mueller wrote in Christian Dogmatics: “We maintain on the basis of Scripture...:

- a. The believer in Christ shall receive for his good works an abundant reward of grace (Matthew 5:10-12 “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” ESV); but
- b. all who demand a reward on account of their good works shall not only forfeit God’s reward of grace, but also lose their salvation (Galatians 5:4 “You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.” NAS).” (416)

Additional passages which support degrees and differences in heaven:

- ⇒ <sup>ESV</sup> **Genesis 15:1** After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: “Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.”
- ⇒ <sup>ESV</sup> **Psalms 84:10** For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the

house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness.

TLSB: “A lowly place in salvation is much better than a lavish life ending in eternal condemnation.” (TLSB, 929)

- ⇒ <sup>ESV</sup> **Daniel 12:3** And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.
- ⇒ <sup>ESV</sup> **Mark 12:38** ... “Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes and like greetings in the marketplaces<sup>39</sup> and have the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts,<sup>40</sup> who devour widows’ houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.”
- ⇒ <sup>ESV</sup> **Luke 6:35** “But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil.”
- ⇒ <sup>ESV</sup> **Luke 14:13** “But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind,<sup>14</sup> and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.”

We should not think about Judgment Day as though it is the **first** time that the godly will be distinguished from the wicked or as though it is the **first** time that the godly will experience the blessed presence of God. But it will be the **first** time the godly **fully** experience God’s presence in their glorified bodies.

- ⇒ <sup>ESV</sup> **John 3:18** “Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.”

- ⇒ <sup>NAS</sup> **John 5:24** “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.”

Instead of thinking about Judgment Day as the first time a distinction is made between the righteous and the wicked, we should see it as the **final and full** awarding of rewards and penalties:

- ⇒ <sup>ESV</sup> **2 Corinthians 5:10** For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

Judgment Day is about the fact that we, in our bodies, will receive the things done in the body. Those who have done evil in the body will receive condemnation. Those who, in the body, have believed in Christ, have been forgiven of their sins, and have new life by God’s Spirit, will receive rewards. Judgment Day is the full and final awarding of rewards and penalties, not the beginning of that awarding.

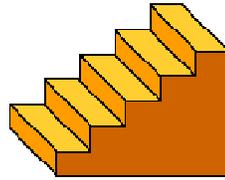
### Everlasting Life with Christ

As we have begun to live with Christ here on earth in the Church through His Word and Sacraments, so we will continue to live with Him after we die. Death is not an interruption of this fellowship with our Lord. Our life with Christ continues, even after death, even before the resurrection. Our departed friends and family members who lived with Christ here below by faith in His cross for their forgiveness even now live with Him and are comforted. Because our life with Christ is not interrupted by death, death for the Christian may be sweet and joyful, even in the midst of tears.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Engelbrecht, E. A. (2009). *The Lutheran Study Bible* (p. 1750). St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.

## The Five Steps Up for the Elect:

Step 1 → **Predestination**  
– **GOD Chose Us Before Creation:** God



“chose us in him [Christ] before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will...” (Eph. 1:4-5 NIV)

Step 2 → **Conception / Physical Birth** – **GOD Gave Us Physical Life:**

- “This is what God the LORD says-- he who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and all that comes out of it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it...” (Isaiah 42:5 NIV)
- “When the LORD saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren.” (Genesis 29:31 ESV)

Step 3 → **Spiritual Birth** – **GOD Gave Us Spiritual Life:**

- God “saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit...” (Titus 3:5 NIV)
- God “chose to give us birth through the word of truth...” (James 1:18 NIV)

Step 4 → **Physical Death** – **GOD Takes the Souls of Those Who Die in Jesus to a Place of Peace and Rest:**

- “The righteous perish, and no one ponders it in his heart; devout men are taken away, and no one understands that the righteous are taken away to be spared from evil. Those who walk uprightly enter into peace [*in their souls*]; they find rest [*in their bodies*] as they lie in death.” (Isaiah 57:1-2 NIV)
- “The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s side.... now [Lazarus] is comforted here [*in heaven*]...” (Luke 16:22, 25 ESV)

Step 5 → **Jesus’ Return** – **GOD Will Dwell with All Who Die in Jesus:**

- <sup>51</sup> “Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, <sup>52</sup> in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable [*and reunited with their souls*], and we shall be changed.” (1Co 15:51 ESV)
- And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” (Revelation 21:3-4 NIV)