

Waiting for the Second Coming

DAVE BAST

“He’s gone,” the nurse will say at the bedside of a dying person when the end finally comes. She passed away or passed on or sometimes just passed, we report of a friend or relative who has died; but the question is, gone where? Passed on to what? We would really like to know about what happens to our loved ones when they die. For that matter, what will happen to us? Does the Bible have any clear teaching on these important questions? That is what we want to explore today on *Groundwork*. Stay tuned.

SCOTT HOEZEE

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast; so Scott, we are now in the second program of a three-part series that we are doing on heaven and the idea: What happens next? What happens after we die? Something that a lot of people obviously are interested in, and as we said in our last program, it is a little bit of a hot topic in some Christian circles now; especially because of books that have been written from the perspective of people who “died,” or had a near-death experience and then they come back and report what they saw, and it is sort of: Yeah, I saw a bright light and then I saw my grandma or I saw my loved ones and then I saw God or I saw Jesus. What do we make of all that without, you know, trying to disrupt anybody’s thinking or upset them or overturn their faith? What we want to do is ask: What does the Bible really say about this?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and I think that is where we want to go because interesting though many of those accounts are of near-death experiences, they are near death. They did not actually die. Nobody who has ever died—really died—has come back like a year later, right?

DAVE BAST

With one exception, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

One really big one, and his name is Jesus, in case you didn’t know; but in the meanwhile, what happens? So, in the first program of this series we looked at Old Testament views and said they are a little bit all over the place. It looked like everybody went to this shadowy, not-so-happy place called sheol; but then as the Old Testament progressed, there is a little hope that maybe for believers anyway there was life with God beyond sheol, and even before the Old Testament was finished, hints of a resurrection of our bodies and going to God in a much more pleasant place than how sheol had usually been pictured.

DAVE BAST

Right; and when...no surprise, I think, to anybody...when we come to the New Testament things do become clearer and we are given a lot more information; and all of that really hinges on the fact of Christ’s resurrection. That is the linchpin. However, we want to say at the outset...and we have covered this, really, in previous *Groundwork* series; most of what the New Testament says about the future it says about the kingdom...about the new creation...the new heavens and the new earth...the final state of all things after

Christ's return; and as we said, we have talked about that and we will touch on it in our last program, but especially in this program we want to focus more on the in-between, the intermediate state, as it is sometimes called.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we should be humble enough to say...I mean, it is sort of in accord with that wonderful line from Psalm 131: O Lord, my heart is not lifted up; my eyes are not raised too high. I do not occupy myself with things too great or marvelous for me. In that spirit of humility, we need to admit that in both the Old Testament and the New Testament you never, ever find a passage that says: Now listen, beloved in the Lord, when you die this is exactly what happens. There is no passage anywhere that spells it out that clearly; not even in the New Testament, even though the New Testament has more of a consistent, emerging picture than probably we have in the Old Testament.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right; so, a lot of the most common questions...you know, when I die will I immediately see God or will I see Jesus or will I see my loved ones who have gone before? Will I know them? Will they know me? Will I be able to look back and see what is going on down here with my kids or my grandkids? A lot of those questions we really cannot answer, not from the Bible. We can speculate; we can suggest; we can kind of extrapolate from clues that were given, but we cannot give definite answers. So, apologies in advance if we don't answer your specific question.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; but as time has gone on, and we have had two thousand years of Church history now...two thousand years of biblical theologians wrestling with this and philosophers and philosophical theologians wrestling with this, there are a few options that people have chosen about what happens when we die. Not what happens after judgment day; we will really touch on that in our final program in this series, but in the meanwhile, and again, the intermediate time, what are the views? Well, there is one view, which is sometimes called materialism, and there are some Christians actually...there are a lot of non-Christians who believe this...but there are Christians who believe this...and the materialist view is, we are a body/soul unity and if your body dies, you are dead in every sense; and so, where do you go after you die? The cemetery. You go nowhere; and sometimes this is called extinctionism. Now, that does not mean that Christians who believe this don't believe you will be fully resurrected at the end; they do believe that; but if you ask a materialist or an extinctionist: Where is Grandpa between now and final judgment day when Jesus raises everybody up, then answer is: Nowhere; which a lot of Christians find deeply, deeply troubling.

DAVE BAST

Yes, no kidding. It used to be called...this is actually a very ancient view. In some Christian circles it was once referred to as soul sleep—that you kind of go extinct or unconscious, at least. You are not aware of what is happening...

SCOTT HOEZEE

You might be with the Lord, but you are out of it.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right; in a very theoretical sense, you are with him. There is another view that we should at least mention, and that is the Roman Catholic view of purgatory, which is to say that many people, when they die, if they are saved, they are not yet fit for heaven so they go for a time of purging or purifying in the fires of purgatory. It is not hell...

SCOTT HOEZEE

And it is not permanent.

DAVE BAST

And it is not permanent; but since we are trying to deal with the Bible and the Bible doesn't really clearly refer to this, we will just mention that...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And then go on to the last view, kind of the majority Christian view.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and we could also say there is also a pop view, which most Christians don't believe but people in the world do, and that is that all dogs go to heaven...

DAVE BAST

Yes, right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Everybody...maybe not Hitler, maybe not Saddam Hussain or, you know, Osama Bin Laden, but most people, yeah, if you were decent, you know, yeah, you go to heaven. Very few Christians believe that. Some do believe in universalism...that you get saved through Christ even though you didn't believe in him, but that...that is out there...that doesn't really go to the intermediate state question, which is really what we are looking at.

DAVE BAST

Right; but you are right, there is this common presumption when anybody dies that they kind of turn into an angel. They sprout wings and they float up into the clouds and they are looking at us down below...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, that is what they think, yes.

DAVE BAST

You see a ball player hit a homerun and he is always pointing toward heaven when he crosses... That's for you, Grandpa...you know...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, right; so that is very common out there.

DAVE BAST

I have always thought, you know, if it is true that somebody is in heaven, they have probably got better things to look at than a baseball game, you know?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, probably; probably God does, too.

DAVE BAST

Better things to do.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But...a main view; so, just to get back to the intermediate state question...a main view of most Christians is that when we die, our bodies go into the ground, but our souls do go to be with the Lord. Paul says: When I die, I will go to be with the Lord, which is far better. So, there is a belief that we are conscious. We are aware. We are not in our new body yet; so, some of this stuff about: Oh, he is up there playing golf and

tennis...Well, with what? He doesn't have any hands; but we are alive; we are awake, and we are in full felicity and joy, and quite possibly we do know our loved ones who are also with us, you know, in the bosom of God; and that is sort of a majority view. Because there are a lot of New Testament passages that speak to this, including even Jesus' words to the thief on the cross: Today you will be with me in paradise. That passage...I think it is in Philippians, where Paul says: If I die and go to be with the Lord it is far better. There is a lot that backs up that idea.

DAVE BAST

Right; and we will look at those in more detail in just a moment.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, and this second program in a short, three-part series on heaven, or the question of what happens after we die, and where will we ultimately end up in God's creation? And we have been looking at, Dave, the intermediate state question, which is a very important pastoral question for so many people who really want to know, and feel like they really need to know where is my mom now that she has died; or people who lose their children...so terrible...where is my little boy? And we just said that although there are three or four options out there, most Christians, and many biblical scholars do opt for this idea that we go spiritually, our soul, goes to be with the Lord. That is not a natural state for us to exist without our bodies. We should have our bodies. God designed us to be embodied creatures; but by God's grace...we are not naturally immortal, we don't believe in that...but by God's grace, our souls go to be with him, and it is a joyful situation in the meantime.

DAVE BAST

Absolutely; and now we want to just point to the many...relatively many passages in the New Testament that indicate this. So, we have a very high degree of confidence. I pay all due respect to the people who want to emphasize the body/soul unity...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Sure.

DAVE BAST

Which is the biblical view of people. We are not just a spirit kind of clothed with this flesh that we want to escape...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; absolutely.

DAVE BAST

Our soul and body are both created by God and they are inextricably combined to make us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And they are both good.

DAVE BAST

And they are both good; and we need both; and God is going to give us both. That is what the end is going to be; but in the meantime, we can also speak with confidence at a graveside, to a dying person, to a person who is grieving the loss of someone they love very much that their loved one is with the Lord if they knew Christ; and the New Testament follows through on that. And I think the place to start is by pointing out that the New Testament clearly affirms the strength of the bond between believers and Jesus.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And never more so than in Romans 8; a famous passage read again at so many funerals, and rightly so:

³⁵Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁷No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers; ³⁹neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

DAVE BAST

Yes, to which we can only say amen and amen. Or you think of Jesus' promise outside the tomb of his friend Lazarus, where he says he is the resurrection and the life and he is reassuring Martha, and later her sister Mary, that if they believe in him they need not fear; and so, Jesus says: I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

So, clearly he is speaking to some degree metaphorically here because we do still physically die. Lazarus had just died...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

But they don't *really* die.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, you are not abandoned to death.

DAVE BAST

No.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are not on your own or alone; and what is really important, Dave, about that passage is...to back up...so, John 11:25 is the famous "I am the resurrection and the life," but Jesus said that because he first came to Martha and said: Your brother will rise again; and Martha said: Big deal! That doesn't help me. I know he will rise again at the *last day*. And then Jesus says: Last day, nothing. I am the resurrection and the life. People live on right now; and he is going to raise Lazarus momentarily just as kind of proof that we are not done for even when we die; and we don't have to wait until judgment day to have a future with God. It is now. I *am*—present tense—the resurrection.

DAVE BAST

Well, and it is like Jesus said to the Sadducees...we have already referenced this, but he quotes the famous formula from the Old Testament: The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and then Jesus adds: He is not the God of the dead, he is the God of living. He cannot be the God of Abraham if Abraham is dead...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And doesn't exist anymore.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And also the transfiguration, where Moses and Elijah just sort of make an appearance, indicating they were with God, too.

DAVE BAST

Or the story of Lazarus and the rich man* that Jesus told, where Lazarus is in Abraham's bosom...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

It is a parable, okay, yes; that wasn't a real person, but clearly the implication of the story is that after death this is an image of the heavenly banquet. Abraham's bosom; he's reclining at the table. A preview of coming things.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly.

DAVE BAST

And again, how can you have a banquet when you don't have a body? But, it is imagery.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Spiritually; and what is interesting is that what this really gets to is one of the most important and moving and lyric doctrines that emerges out of the Bible—out of the New Testament—and that is the whole concept of union with Christ. So, Paul uses “in Christ” all over the place in his letters to indicate that is where we are now. Already now, once you get baptized, you gain union with Christ. Your spiritual address and zip code right now on this earth is in Christ. That is where you live; and death will not change that spiritual address and zip code. You will remain in Christ even short of the day when your new body is given to you.

DAVE BAST

Right; so, maybe the key passage in...certainly one of the key passages in all the New Testament is from Philippians 1 on this question; and Scott, you already just alluded to it briefly, but I think it is worth visiting at greater length. Paul is writing to the church in Philippi. He is in prison in Rome. He is going to be tried for his life. If he is condemned, he is going to be executed. So, he is telling them: You know, in effect, it doesn't really matter which way it goes because it is a win-win for me, as we would say nowadays. So, he writes: ^{1:21}For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. ²²If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. (In other words, it would be good for you. I can still do ministry.)

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, I can be your pastor.

DAVE BAST

^{1:22b}Yet, what shall I choose? I do not know. ²³I am torn between the two. I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far. That beautiful word *depart* was used of a ship setting sail, you know, out of the harbor; and that is Paul's view of death. He is not departing into the great void; he is not launching out into the unknown; his departure means he will be with Christ, and where is Christ? He's in heaven!

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; at the right hand of the Father...and right, Paul clearly is not saying I will be with Christ, fast-forwarding in time and I will instantly arrive at the last day. No, he is saying even in the meanwhile, I will be with Christ; and that is important, by the way. What you just mentioned, Dave, the doctrine of the ascension; we believe as Christians that Jesus—who is still in his body—once Jesus gained a body from the womb of

Mary, he is never going to lose it. Jesus will forever be the incarnate Son of God, but that body right now is next to the Father in a spiritual plane we call heaven, and that is true right this very second, even as you listen to this *Groundwork* program, Jesus is at the right hand of the Father; and that is where our souls go when we die and that is where they remain with Christ until the last day comes, and then we have the final resurrection.

DAVE BAST

Right; that is what we believe. Well, there is one last thing that we could try to address anyway, and that is what do we do in heaven? What is it like exactly, and we will see if the New Testament, specifically, can help us answer that question in just a moment.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast. So, the question is: What is heaven like? What will be the experience of believers who go there? And I think maybe to start with we should say what it *isn't* going to be like, and it isn't going to be like, again, most of the popular conceptions of it, where we suddenly turn into angels and we float around on clouds and we strum harps all day long with wings, you know.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and in our final program we are going to look at that much more extensively as to why that sort of wispy picture is wrong. Now, it is true...you know, I mean, those who picture streets of gold and gates of sapphire...I mean, there are things like in Revelation 21, where we get this description of a city studded with jewels and streets of gold...

DAVE BAST

Even transparent gold, in Revelation. What does that look like?

SCOTT HOEZEE

But that is not to take away from what we will ultimately say, what we have already been saying in this program; at the end we will get our body back; and so, wherever it is we live, it is going to have to be a physical place because we are going to be physical. You really cannot live on a cloud when you have a body. You would just kind of fall through. So, you know, we don't want to picture it as being non-physical because we believe we will be physical. We will get a body back. But we have been talking in this program particularly, Dave, about that intermediate state, and maybe one thing we can think about is what should we think... We don't want to be mean to anybody and we don't want to criticize anybody's funeral that we never attended, or something; but, what do we make of those sort of pious, somewhat overly sentimental sentiments you sometimes hear at funerals that: Well, right now, you know, he is on the 19th tee and he is playing golf, or...

DAVE BAST

Yes, right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Or she is quilting because she always loved to quilt and she is quilting with Jesus. So, we get a lot of these pictures as though they already have another body and are using it in some way to play golf or tennis or whatever their favorite activity was. What do you make of that? We don't want to take away the hope that this person is with the Lord, because that we believe, but can we really say a whole lot more about what that is like or what about the big question: Can they see us? Do they pray for us and intercede for us in our lives while we go on here on earth? This is a very, very sensitive question for a lot of people.

DAVE BAST

It is, and this is where it repays a good deal of caution on our part. Like you say, we don't want to hurt anybody; but really, the Bible doesn't give any kind of specific, clear indication or guidance that there is a lot of continuity between what the saints in glory experience and what we are living through here below; and you can just stop and think about it in a more or less rational moment and realize that is such a different plane of existence, that is just such a different experience, to be in the presence of God. I mean, who cares about golf when you are in the presence of God? Whatever it is that we love here below, its true expression is found in what in the Middle Ages they called the beatific vision—to be able to see God—to be able to be in the presence of God—is the meeting of every need that we could possibly have. We quoted this in the first program, from Psalm 16:

¹¹(paraphrased) At your right hand are pleasures forevermore; in your presence there is fullness of joy. That is the reality, and those who are experiencing it, at least partially—at least spiritually—have much more to do and to say and to be than anything that we've got going on here.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And again, as we have said in the previous program in this series, and in this one, you basically never find a bible passage that says: Now, beloved, when you die BOOM, here is exactly what you can expect. But, there is a passage in II Corinthians, where Paul comes as close as you are going to get to what the intermediate state is like because he writes this:

^{5:1}For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven not built by human hands. ²Meanwhile, we groan, longing to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, ³because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. ⁴For while we are in this tent we groan and are burdened because we do not wish to be unclothed, but to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. ⁶Therefore, we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. ⁷For we live by faith not by sight. ⁸We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and home with the Lord. ⁹So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it.

DAVE BAST

So, there is Paul in II Corinthians 5, using the analogy of a tent and a home for our physical bodies and our physical existence; and he says: You know, if this is destroyed, which it will be when we die, we have got a better place—we have got another place—and the great word that he uses for it...and you know, this is probably the most we can say: It's home...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Home.

DAVE BAST

Whatever that suggests to you; and home as it is meant to be. Not everyone has a great home. Not everyone experienced a wonderful home life as a child, but the reality is in heaven and it is with Christ. So, those two things we hang onto. We are with him; we are in the presence of God; we are enjoying that vision that is the fulfillment of every desire, every hope, every longing, and we are at home.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That has got to be good enough for us, right? And all these other questions: Is Grandma looking down on us? Can they see what we do? How could they be joyful in the Lord if they see a tragedy happen in our lives here? Those are speculative questions and they may feel important, but the Bible is not interested in answering them, and so maybe we shouldn't be pressing them too much. It is enough to know they are with the Lord, and if they are still able to pray for us and that is in God's good, good wisdom in that heavenly home, great; but that is the comfort and the hope; our loved ones are not nowhere and they are not just in the cemetery; they are with the Lord at home.

DAVE BAST

And that is a wonderful hope that all believers can look forward to. Well, thanks for joining our *Groundwork* conversation. I am Dave Bast, with Scott Hoezee, and we would like to know how we can help you continue digging deeper into scripture. So visit groundworkonline.com to tell us what topics or passages you would like to dig into next on *Groundwork*.

***Correction:** When referencing Jesus Christ's parable found in Luke 16:19-31, the audio of this program misstates the reference as "Lazarus and the beggar," when in fact the correct reference is "Lazarus and the rich man."

<https://groundworkonline.com/episodes/waiting-for-the-second-coming>

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