

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Second Sunday in Lent, March 12, 2017

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 603, 227:5, 611:1-5, 616:1-4, 611:7

Lessons: 1 Kings 17:1-24, 1 Corinthians 15:42-44, Luke 16:19-31.

Sermon Text: John 14:1-4.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Many people have some very strange ideas about what happens to a person after he or she dies. Most people would like to think that after dying, a person “goes to a better place”, particularly if that person has experienced pain or illness leading up to death. But what really happens after death? Today let’s look at what God teaches about

THE RESURRECTION AND LIFE EVERLASTING

- 1. What really will happen after death?**
- 2. How does one attain “Everlasting Life”?**

The Scriptures teach that at the Last Day God will raise up me and all the dead, so that our bodies, the same bodies that have died, shall be made alive. ***“A time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out.”*** John 5:28-29 (NIV)

We have no other authority than the Scriptures. There is no human who has experienced death and come back to life to tell about it except the histories recorded in Scripture. Reason and experience do not support it. Still there is a feeling in every man, which tells him that death is not the end, but that there is something beyond. People generally do not deny some kind of a resurrection of the body. Any denial may be because they are afraid to meet their God in judgment.

The resurrection of all the dead will take place on the Last Day, and it is brought about by the omnipotent power of God, whose voice all the dead shall hear and obey.

How do the dead become alive? We have this example from our Old Testament lesson. The dead child revived when his soul returned to his body. So the souls of men will return to the very bodies from which they departed in death. Job confessed ***“after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God.”*** Job 19:26 (NIV)

Those living at the coming of Christ will not die and then be raised again, but they shall be changed in a moment to make them suitable for their future existence. ***“We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed – in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.”*** 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 (NIV)

Although all the dead will be brought back to life, there is a major difference between the resurrection of believers in Christ and unbelievers. ***“Those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.”*** John 5:29 (NIV) Now lest we think that “doing good” causes one go to heaven, we must emphasize the words of Christ: ***“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”*** Mark 16:16 (NIV)

The believers will rise with glorified bodies to everlasting life in heaven. Scripture assures us that the Lord Jesus Christ ***“will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.”*** Philippians 3:21 (NIV)

The unbelievers will rise to eternal death, that is, to everlasting shame, contempt, and torment in the fires of hell. Jesus speaks of the rich man who was condemned to hell: ***“In hell, where he was in torment, he***

looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. 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.'" Luke 16:23-24 (NIV) We even read in the Old Testament the last words of Isaiah: *"And they will go out and look upon the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind."* Isaiah 66:24 (NIV)

There is no difference between believers and unbelievers in the resurrection itself. In each case the soul returns to its own respective body. But there is a great difference in the condition of their bodies and in their future destinies. The believers will have glorified and incorruptible bodies, freed from all defects and weaknesses, which are the results of sin, and they will inherit eternal life, and be with God.

The unbelievers also will arise and continue to live a conscious existence. But they awake unto *"shame and everlasting contempt"* Daniel 12:2 (NIV), *"and they will be loathsome to all mankind."* Isaiah 66:24 (NIV) In body and soul they will be forever tormented in hell. On Judgment Day Jesus will say *"Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels."* Matthew 25:41 (NIV)

Temporal death is the separation of body and soul. This state continues until the day of resurrection. In the meantime the body lies in the grave and returns unto dust, but the soul is either in heaven or in hell. Judas Iscariot went to his own place in hell with the spirits of those who were disobedient. After judgment both body and soul will be either in heaven or in hell.

There is no transmigration or reincarnation of souls for the purpose of purifying or perfecting them, nor do the souls of the departed return to this earth to warn the living.

Hell is not an imaginary thing or place, but a harsh and dreadful reality. You heard in our Gospel lesson about the unbelieving rich man who was *"in agony in this fire."* Luke 16:24 (NIV) Jesus warns us: *"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."* Matthew 10:28 (NIV) We do not know where hell is. It was prepared for the devil and his angels, but the unbelievers shall also be thrown into hell. They will not be annihilated or simply cease to exist, but will continue to live in torment and pain. In that place they are forever banished from the blissful presence of God. They suffer torment in body and soul for which there is no relief, not even a drop of water, and there is no escape and there is no end to torments. In this place *"there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."* Matthew 8:12 (KJV) There is not the faintest hope to cheer the condemned in their misery. Their anguish of soul is increased by the fact that they are conscious of the bliss of others in heaven, and is intensified in those who during their lives on earth also had an opportunity to be saved.

However, there are only two places, heaven and hell. There is no purgatory, where allegedly souls are purified before they are admitted to heaven. After death there is no opportunity for improving one's condition. *"Now is the day of salvation."* 2 Corinthians 6:2 (NIV) Before we die, we must by faith in Christ make sure that we escape the torments of hell.

Make no mistake. Do not be deceived. There will be a resurrection of the body, leading immediately to eternal damnation or to eternal joy and glory.

As believers sincerely and honestly confess in the creed, we also believe in "the life everlasting". What do the Scriptures teach of eternal life? The Scriptures teach that at the time of death the soul of the believer is at once received into the presence of Christ. This is evident and obvious from Christ's words to the penitent thief on the cross: *"I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."* Luke 23:43 (NIV)

Scripture teaches that at the Last Day the believer will live with Christ, both body and soul, in eternal joy and glory. *"You will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand."* Psalm 16:11 (NIV) Jesus prayed in the upper room on the same night he was betrayed: *"Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world."* John 17:24 (NIV)

So what does Scripture teach about heaven? Well, we do not know where heaven is, but we know the way. *"Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'"* John 14:6 (NIV) And we know that when we die in the faith the angels of God will take our souls to the eternal mansions of our God.

To give us a faint idea of the joy and glory of heaven, the Bible uses words and pictures taken from this earthly life. It speaks of a marriage, of a banquet and of thrones, of a place with many mansions, and of the heavenly Jerusalem. All this must be taken figuratively, and is intended to show the surpassing beauty of that heavenly place.

Conditions in the world to come will be quite different from those on earth. There will be no marriage, no separate families and nationalities, no civil government for the punishment of evildoers, no earthly careers to provide the necessities of life. The wicked shall not live among the saints to vex and harass them. The tares, that is, the weeds, that is, the unbelievers, have already been separated from the wheat. We shall live in the company of righteous people made perfect.

We shall be the same persons we are now, but we shall be changed. We shall not be spirits, but shall have spiritual bodies, not subject to the same needs and laws that govern us now. We shall have incorruptible bodies, free from all traces and consequences of sin; strong bodies, free from frailties, weaknesses, defects and deformities; immortal bodies, that shall not grow sick or old and die; glorious bodies, clothed with perfection, honor, and glory. At present we have no adequate conception of what we shall be, but the glory that shall be revealed in us surpasses all imagination.

As for the soul, the image of God will be fully restored in us. ***“Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”*** 1 John 3:2 (NIV)

We shall have blissful knowledge of God, of his will and his ways, and shall understand what we do not know. We shall be rid of the old Adam, of sin, of sorrow and grief. We shall be perfectly righteous and holy. The thoughts, desires, and actions of all will be in full harmony with the will of God. There will be full satisfaction, perfect contentment, absolute security, unspeakable joy and pleasure, which no man or devil shall take from us.

And who will receive all this joy and glory? To whom will God give eternal life? God will give eternal life to me and all believers, but to believers only. ***“God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”*** John 3:16 (KJV) ***“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him.”*** John 3:36 (NIV)

Because God loved the world, he wants all men to have everlasting life. But no man can receive it except by faith in Christ. The believer "has everlasting life"; it is his even now. It is his inheritance, and its greatest glory is reserved in heaven for him. Eternal life in heaven is the glorious continuation of our present spiritual life in faith. Thus it must be our chief concern that we continue in the true faith unto the end.

How can I be sure that I will receive everlasting life? Are you sure that you will enter eternal life?

I firmly believe that, as God has in this life called me by the Gospel, enlightened, sanctified, and kept me in the true faith, even so he has from eternity chosen me unto the adoption of God's children and unto life everlasting. Jesus said ***“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.”*** John 10:27-28 (NIV) The entire work of sanctification, namely, that by the Gospel the Holy Ghost called, enlightened, justified, sanctified, keeps me in the faith, and will finally save me by this faith, is not a thing of chance. But what God has done, is doing, and will do for me to bring me to heaven he has intended and resolved to do for me from eternity. Thus he has during my life blessed me with spiritual blessings according as he has from eternity chosen me by grace in Christ Jesus. What he then purposed and planned, he carries out during my life on earth, because whom he chose and predestinated, he calls, justifies, and saves.

And so we close this article with the words "This is most certainly true". Everything we confess in this article is plainly taught in the Bible. Therefore we firmly believe it. And so we pray ***“I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!”*** Mark 9:24 (NIV) Amen.