

Death is not the End.

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Thirteen years ago, on September 11th, 2001, the incident occurred in the United States, that was beyond imagination. Huge numbers of people were killed instantly by the terrorist attack. At the fire station in the city of New York that engaged in the rescue works on that day, these words are inscribed on stone wall;

No farewell words were spoken
No time to say goodbye
You were gone before we knew it,
and only God knows why.

As is written in here, no one can explain why so many people had to die this way from humans' thoughts. Some people may say, from a religious perspective, that it was a "divine punishment." This is the thought farthest from the truth. No true God punishes humans in this manner. Actually, he has no need to punish us. Jesus Christ has already sacrificed himself and took the punishment for human arrogance and sins. This is what the Bible wants to tell us. The prophet Isaiah praised God when he wrote:

Look! God—yes God—is my salvation; I will trust,
and not be afraid. For the Lord is my strength and
my song, and he has become my salvation. (Isaiah
12:2)
[International Standard Version]

I believe that having such conviction is a supreme blessing. Now, what is the salvation after all?

1 The 'Salvation' in the Bible

The "salvation" mentioned in the Bible is the "solution to the problem of your sins" in the first place. All humans are arrogant and commit sins and thus, they are tormented by remorse of their consciences. Although there is nothing we can do to atone for our own sins, the salvation of Jesus brings us the conviction that our sins are forgiven and forgotten.

In addition, true salvation is a "liberation from isolation." All humans have loneliness in their hearts. We want to be cared for more and we want to be loved more. However, when we accept the salvation of

Jesus, we are no longer alone. Because Jesus loves me, he will never leave me or forsake me. When we are given this conviction, we will be liberated from loneliness.

Furthermore, true salvation is a "liberation from fear of death." Most people don't want to think about their death. But we all have to die one day. "Death" is nothing but fear if we can't face the final stage of our life with peace and hope. Liberation from the fear of "death" is exactly the salvation offered through Jesus. These words are taken from the Bible:

Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?
But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory
through our Lord Jesus the Messiah! (1 Corinthians
15:55-57)

If we are liberated from the fear of "death," and can proclaim from the bottom of our hearts that we have won the victory over death, we will be truly blessed.

I can never forget what the son of the president of a German publishing company said, when he was asked on a TV program, "What do you think would be the most mind-blowing thing to happen in your life?" His answer was, "If God exists, it would be unimaginably fearful for me." He meant that, if the Lord God exists, "death" is not the end of everything, but he would absolutely be judged after death. Indeed, it will be unimaginably fearful if we are judged to live in hell forever, where we see no light at all with no peace, no joy, and no hope.

The Bible explains that in heaven, "There won't be death anymore. There won't be any grief, crying, or pain," in Revelation 21:4. The glory that is promised for those who have obtained "salvation" will be truly magnificent, as the Apostle Paul said, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed to us," in Romans 8:18.

2 Look Straight into Death

My youngest daughter Linde got cancer while she was a nursing student, and she was raised to heaven when she was 20 years old. For this girl, her health or happiness did not mean anything, and she did not care about these things at all. I feel happy when Jesus alone is glorified—this was the attitude she always had. And this testimony of hers eventually bore abundant fruit. It made so many people who were with Linde seek Jesus, and they came to encounter Jesus personally. Linde wrote on her Bible, "Honorable people can look straight into death."

Many people consider that they would never understand what comes after death until they actually die, and so prefer not to be bothered by such problems while they are alive in this world. Generally speaking, people do not feel comfortable discussing “death” and they refuse to talk about it. Louis XIV of France, who was called the Sun King, was one of such people. When he saw a funeral cortege passing by, he immediately gave the order to close all the curtains. He was the monarch who could have anything he desired, including honors, status, and wealth. However, “death” was the only thing he feared. The famous German poet and politician, Wolfgang von Goethe, also had an abhorrence of “death,” so much so that he refused to attend the funerals even of his closest friends.

People make plans for various aspects of their lives and try to act according to them. However, knowing that all plans will be totally messed up when “death” arrives, they close their minds to “death.” Instead, they hold on to their strong desire to enjoy worldly pleasures while they are alive.

This is nothing but the work of the devil. The devil constantly attempts to keep people from contemplating their “death.” He dazzles their eyes, tempts them into a life of worldly pleasure, and draws them into snares of evil. However, “death” is an inevitable reality. Every day, an uncountable number of people die of disease or accidents. During the past two world wars, 80 million people were killed. In Japan alone, more than 30,000 people take their own lives every year. “Death” is an undeniable fact. I would have to say that those who refuse to think seriously about death are unwise.

3 Life after Death

The Bible explains the existence of life after death that is separated from this world.

If we think rationally about “death,” we would be compelled to admit that “death” does not mean the end of all things. It is absolutely unreasonable to believe that the lives of men that were created by the forever living true God end with “death.” When people begin to work, they have some purpose in their minds. When a carpenter builds a house or, a machine is built in a factory, it always begins with a clear image of what is going to be archived. No one can work without meaning and purpose. Hence, when the Lord God Almighty created men, he surely did so with one clear objective. That is why, when we think of our “death,” we need to pay attention to what follows after death, instead of concentrating solely on “death” itself. I would like to have discussion the “world after death” from six perspectives.

(1) Life is too Short

Our life in this world is too short. When we think of a human being’s lifespan, which is just 120 years at best, we can’t help but admit the truthfulness of what is written in the Bible. The Bible says that, “You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes” (James 4:14). Our lives are so trivial, and even the history of mankind recorded in the Bible that is longer than 6000 years is no different from a “mist” before the eyes of the Lord God. None of us can experience what occurred 100 years ago, or what will happen 100 years later.

When we think of how short our life is, it seems natural to come up with the idea that there is another life after death. The Bible clearly assures the existence of the world after death. We begin to live in the true world only after death.

(2) Aspiration for “Eternity” and “Perfection”

The Bible states that the Lord God Himself has instilled in our hearts an aspiration for eternity. Man was created in the image of the Lord God. And this God gave us the ability to comprehend the meaning of “eternity” and realize what “perfection” is. So, humans will not be satisfied with temporal, fleeting pleasures, or anything imperfect. We all want to love someone wholeheartedly and want to be loved in turn. But, there is no love like that in this world. It is why we are repeatedly disappointed by mortal love in this world. Artists bring enormous passion into creating a perfect piece of art. But they often hurl their own creations at the wall when they see some imperfections in their own work.

While young people see unlimited hope in their future and never doubt that it will last forever, older people feel that the years are passing so quickly and realize the frailty of time from experience. Women spend a lot of money and make desperate efforts to keep themselves looking younger and more attractive. However, the time will come when they realize that there is nothing they can do and become disappointed.

Humans are perpetually caught in a tide of desires that follow one after another, and they will never be satisfied. Some people run after the latest trends, which come and go so fast, and will never bring them true happiness. Businessmen cudgel their brains out to make as much profit as they can. Dictators are not satisfied with ruling their own countries, but desire to force the whole world under their control. So-called workaholics place the highest priority on their job and throw their hearts into their work, ignoring all other

aspects of their lives. But eventually the day will come when they lose the sense of what they are living for, and begin to feel suffocated. When people succeed in their business, get a lot of money, and are physically healthy, they may look very happy from the human perspective; but their hearts are always filled with unsatisfied desires. No one but our Lord God can truly fulfill our hearts. The intention of the Lord God is simply for us humans to stay in Jesus and have eternal life.

In chapter 4 of the Gospel according to John there appears a woman of adultery, who had five husbands. Undoubtedly, she had been pursuing worldly happiness, but this desperate wish has never been fulfilled. This was when the Lord Jesus said to this woman, "Whoever drinks the water that I will give him will never become thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become a well of water for him, springing up to eternal life," (John 4:14). Then this woman replied to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I won't get thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water," (John 4:15).

A great thinker of the medieval times and a Christian, Augustine confessed that, "I have no lasting peace until I rest in the Lord God."

(3) No Life after Death?

If there is no life after death, the life in this world that ends with death is utterly meaningless. Our lives we are living now have no meaning unless they are connected to an "eternity." If death puts an end to everything, what is the value of all of the efforts made during our lifetime? The wise King Solomon said that all things in this world are meaningless; in fact, they are "utterly pointless," (Ecclesiastes 1:2). Although he was in the position of the King, he had to say in his confession that "everything was meaningless." Nothing in this world will preserve its value forever. All things we have while we are alive will fall away from us at the moment of our death.

Materialists would say: Let us enjoy wining and dining today as nobody knows what will happen to our lives tomorrow. However, eventually, when you get old and all money and time are spent out, you can't help but realize that only illness and death are waiting for you. If you fail to deal with the problem of life after death, you will have to kill yourself or become insane; either way you will end up in miserable desolation.

(4) Justice in this World?

The justice of this world does not satisfy us from the bottom of our hearts. Because our desperate thirst for

perfect righteousness can never be satisfied by worldly justice. There are so many injustices in this world that escape without being properly judged. On the other hand, those who live a righteous life do not always receive the honor and rewards they deserve. In actuality, a lot of people have been persecuted or even murdered because of their pursuit of the truth. If death means to put a period on all things, this life would be absolutely meaningless. However, it is not true.

(5) Reunion

It is a blessing to have the conviction that you can see your loved ones again when you die. Certainly, separation by death is equally sad and painful, even for Christians. Nevertheless, death is merely a temporary separation from your loved ones and you will absolutely see them again in heaven—having such a conviction is the ultimate consolation and joy for believers.

(6) Two Worlds that Come after Death

Jesus has promised to come back. It will be the time for believers to see Jesus face to face and to be transformed into his image—this is exactly the plan of our God, the Creator.

We should not forget that men are created for the purpose of the Lord himself. Because the first man, Adam committed sin and he was separated from the Lord God, all men have lost lively fellowship with the Lord God. Unless we recover lively fellowship with the Lord God, we cannot continue our lives in truly meaningful way. We are given the unimaginably wonderful promise that our sins will be forgiven, we will be saved, and live in an eternal fellowship with Jesus.

In fact, man-made religions can't give concrete explanations about a life after death, but only provide an abstract description based on their own imagination. Contrarily, the Bible, which consists of the words of God, clearly explains the existence of life after death, not only for believers, but for non-believers too.

According to the Bible, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who lived 4,000 years ago, are still alive in heaven. On the other hand, those who refuse to repent will be thrown into Hades where they will have to suffer. Jesus mentioned that when those who refused to be penitent to the Lord will suffer in Hades after death, they will never be unconscious, but they will remain clearly conscious and will have to endure all pains. All those who refused to believe will be hauled before the Lord God in Hades and will have to go through the Last Judgment.

Death is not the end after all. Those who were saved and even those who were not saved will continue to live after death. At that time, saved people will be given eternal life and stay together with the Lord God, while those who refuse to repent will have to perish in pain and agony according to the Bible.

4 Eternal Life

Let me summarize the discussion so far as follows. First of all, when people are born into this world, they are given a “soul” along with the privilege to exist forever. Secondly, when these people repent of their sins and are newly reborn by a faith that believes in Jesus, they receive “eternal life.” Thirdly, they will receive, at the time of the resurrection, a “nonperishable body.” Certainly, non-believers, too will exist forever, but they cannot have an eternal life, unless they are reborn.

Eternal life only exists when we are in fellowship with Jesus. It is explained by John in these verses:

And this is eternal life: to know you, the only true God, and the one whom you sent—Jesus the Messiah. (John 17:3)

Jesus the Messiah, who is the true God and eternal life. (1John 5:20)

Those who refuse to believe in the true Lord God do not have true life in this world. They are not fulfilled, for they do not have peace with the Lord God.

Linde wrote, before she was taken up to heaven at 20 years old, “Honorable people can look straight into death.” Those who can look straight into “death” are those who were saved by Jesus. Paul testified that “Jesus is my peace” in Ephesians 2:14. Jesus accomplished reconciliation between the Lord God and us. The Lord Jesus has totally wiped away our debts, and sins of turning away from the Lord God, and confronting the Lord God, by the precious sacrifice of himself.

True peace can only be attained through belief in Jesus. All believers of Jesus are granted the certainty that they have peace and reconciliation with the Lord God. The Lord God is not angry anymore, because, the sacrifice of Jesus has accomplished perfect redemption and reconciliation with God. Now, nothing can sever our ties with God. Those who make peace with the Lord God do not have to fear death anymore, because they can rest in perfect solace and harmony.

The composer, John Sebastian Bach, left a number of masterpieces, in which he clearly expressed his sincere wish for “death.” When Bach saw, in the eyes of faith, the magnificence of the world that comes after death rather than the world he was living in, he was compelled to praise the Lord. Once, the believers of God were no different from non-believers, in that they were sinners and were equally destined to go to Hades. Nevertheless, the Crucifixion of Jesus, the only-begotten Son of God, has redeemed their debts and liberated all believers from their sins so that they can attain eternal life. It is written in the Epistle to Romans:

There is now no condemnation for those who are in union with the Messiah Jesus. (Romans 8:1)

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor anything above, nor anything below, nor anything else in all creation can separate us from the love of God that is ours in union with the Messiah Jesus, our Lord. (Romans 8:38-39)

Indeed, “death” plays the role of a bridge to let believers reach Jesus.

I eagerly expect and hope that I will have nothing to be ashamed of, because the Messiah will be exalted through me, whether I live or die. For to me, to go on living is the Messiah, and to die is gain. (Philippians 1:20-21)

Indeed, I cannot decide between the two. I have the desire to leave this life and be with the Messiah, for that is far better. But for your sake it is better that I remain alive. (Philippians 1:23-24)

For those who have been saved by the grace of the Lord, to die is to become one with Jesus, which is gain for them. Paul contemplated which was better for him, to die or to live, and he wished death. Saved people are free from the fear of “death,” in which non-believers are caught.

During the second world war, 6 million Jews were murdered by Adolf Hitler. In those days, the ten Boom family in Holland provided shelter to many Jews in order to protect them. One day, their house was raided by the secret police of the Nazis and they were all sent to concentration camps, where all family members except one daughter called Corrie were slaughtered. However, at the moment when they left their home, Corrie's father said filled with great joy, “the most wonderful thing is about to begin.” What he was saying was that it was not a departure for a dreadful journey

to death, but they were leaving for a trip to be with Jesus—a trip which was filled with supreme joy and thankfulness.

When people decide to belong to the Lord Jesus, they will see the glory to come in the future and are given the hope to live. As a result, they can rejoice in the Lord even in times of terrible ordeal, for they have no reason to worry about their future. We are not able to predict what will happen in the future but we know Jesus. This means that all questions about our future have been answered in Jesus. Jesus himself is our future. All worries and anxieties are healed by Jesus. Jesus will never fail to lead all his believers to his destination. This conviction makes us, believers of the Lord Jesus, so gratified, proud and grateful now.

David, the King of Israel said three thousand years ago;

The Lord is the one who is shepherding me; I lack nothing. Even when I walk through a valley of deep darkness, I will not be afraid because you are with me. (Psalms 23:1,4)

I trust that the supreme blessing is to have a conviction like this.

End