

Escaping death

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In late the 19th Century, Europe and America were fascinated by an escape artist and illusionist Harry Houdini who was born in Budapest, Hungary. He was known for his sensational escape acts from just about anything. Some people who admired Houdini's acts, thought that he might be able to escape his own death as well. He couldn't.

More recently, another illusionist and endurance artist David Blaine started more high-profile feats of endurance and escape acts than what Houdini used to do. When Blaine dies, he will not escape his death and come back to life, either.

Many people are rather uncomfortable even talking about their death out of sheer fear and unknown. That is why Jainism, Hinduism, and Buddhism all subscribe reincarnation. The word "reincarnation" derives from Latin, literally meaning, "entering the flesh again". The idea of reincarnation is nothing more than a useless defiance to the solemn truth of the end of one's earthly life.

In recent decades, many Europeans and North Americans who are into Spiritism have developed an interest in reincarnation and hope that they will be able to come back to life in better situations. Hollywood movie makers and actors are heavily into this concept because the idea of coming back to life is so much more appealing and comforting than standing in front of the Ultimate Judge, God of the Bible to whom they all must give account for what they have done and be judged.

A. WHAT AMERICANS THINK ABOUT LIFE AFTER DEATH

About ten years ago Barna Research Group in Ventura, CA did a study of the American people's views about life after death. The results were surprisingly traditional views about it. However, since the lifestyles, values, and self-perceptions of most adults have undergone significant change from the traditional Judeo-Christian upbringing to a postmodern worldview, it was not surprising that more than 50 million adults are uncertain regarding their personal eternal fate.

Here are some statistics of their answers:

1) Heaven is:

- A state of eternal existence in God's presence – 46%
- An actual place of rest and reward where souls go after death – 30%
- Symbolic – 14%
- There is no such thing as life after death – 5%
- Not sure – 5%

2) Hell is:

- A state of eternal separation from God's presence – 39%
- An actual place of torment and suffering where people's souls go after death – 32%
- A symbol of an unknown bad outcome after death – 13%
- Not sure or do not believe in an afterlife – 16%

3) Eternal destinations

- Expect to go to hell upon their death – 0.5%
- Expect to go to heaven upon their death – 64%

- Reincarnate as another life form – 5%
- Cease to exist – 5%

Among those who expect to go to Heaven, there were differences in how they anticipate such an end would be attained:

- Confessed their sins and accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior – 43%
- Have tried to obey the 10 Commandments – 15%
- Basically a good person – 15%
- They believe that God loves all people and will not let them perish – 6%

One of the intriguing findings from the research is that the more education a person gets or the more income they earn, the less likely they are to believe that heaven or hell exists. It is no wonder some people say that 'Ph.D .' stands for "Pile high in deep".

B. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST

Romans 6:8-9 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is among the most important of all biblical truths. It is foundational. It is bedrock. Many other aspects of the Christian faith depend and rest on the fact of the Resurrection. Let me share with you just three essential Christian truths that depend on the resurrection.

1) Life beyond death depends on the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 15:21-22 For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.

Jesus' victory over death promises us that we, too, will overcome death. When we overcome death, we get to have eternal life in heaven instead of eternal death in hell.

2) God's future judgment of the world rests upon the resurrection.

Acts 17:31 because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.

This promise reminds us that God will judge all the unbelievers one day. To those who are born-again will receive the rewards according to what they have done.

3) The resurrection of Christ gives us power to live the Christian life.

Romans 8:11 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

The Resurrection, therefore, promise us that God will not only give us life beyond the grave, but He will give us power to live the Christian life on earth.

C. THE FIRST RESURRECTION

Because of our Lord Jesus' resurrection, we who are born-again including those who have passed away will have resurrection. By now, some of you are confused. You are thinking, "I thought that all the born-again believers will go to heaven when they die." Yes, thousand times yes. Their souls are with the Lord Jesus in heaven after their death immediately, but not their bodies, so far. Their bodies are still on earth somewhere. Let me show you their resurrection – the First Resurrection:

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the

dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

How would you like to be an unbelieving grave digger on that day when all these born-again believers' bodies coming out of their graves? You probably will break all the Olympic records in running. This will be the First Resurrection.

D. THE SECOND RESURRECTION

Revelation 20:11-15 Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. 12 And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. 13 The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. 14 Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. 15 And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.

This will be the Second Resurrection for all the unbelievers in human history. They will be raised and will stand before God's judgment. Heaven and earth will flee away and no place will be left for sinners to hide. All must face the ultimate Judge!

The Judge is Jesus Christ, because God the Father has committed all judgment to Him. Now all the unbelievers must be judged by Him whom they rejected while they were alive and face eternal death.

This Great White Throne Judgment will be nothing like our modern court cases. At the Great White Throne, there will be a Judge but no jury; a prosecution but no defense; a sentence but no appeal; facts but no technicality or loophole. No one will be able to defend oneself or accuse God of unrighteousness.

Hell is a witness to the righteousness and holiness of God. He must judge sin. Hell is also a witness to man's responsibility, the fact that he is not a robot or a helpless victim, but a creature able to make choices. God does not "send people to hell", they send themselves by rejecting the Savior.

John 3:18-19 He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

E. NO ONE IS OUT OF GOD'S GRACE

Luke 23:40-43 But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, "Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong." Then he said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."

There were three crosses on Calvary's hill where Jesus died. On one was a man dying in sin – he did not accept Jesus. On another was a man dying to sin – he trusted Jesus as Savior and Lord. And on the middle cross was One dying for sins of others. He was God's Son and had no sin of His own. The center cross made all

the difference for those two men hanging beside Jesus – the difference between an eternal hell and an eternal heaven.

The whole world is represented by those two thieves and their response to the Lord Jesus. I see in the three crucified individuals a picture of the sinner, the saint, and the Savior.

You may say, "You don't know what I have done." That's right. I don't know and I don't need to know. But God knows it exactly, yet still loves you and forgives your sins if you come to Him with a sincere heart. You, too, will hear His word of forgiveness and hope.

And some of you might be thinking, "Hey, I am a good person. I believe that there is a God. I don't need to accept Jesus into my heart to go to heaven." No, you cannot make your way to heaven. Heaven is open to all, but it is by invitation only. You must accept the invitation through Jesus Christ. If you insist on your way, you will stand in front of the Great White Throne Judgment to be condemned to hell by your own choice.

F. GOD LOVES YOU

Do you know anyone who loves you so much to die for you? Jesus did. God sent His best for you and me. God loves you and has a great plan for you. Don't reject His invitation for your eternal life in Christ Jesus. Receive Him today, not tomorrow. For tomorrow may never come.

Jesus declares, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."* That means that there is absolutely no other way to get to heaven other than through Jesus Christ.

The Bible also says, *"If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."*

Right now I am going to give you an opportunity to receive Jesus as your Lord and Savior. Please remember that you don't have to be anyone special to be a child of God. You don't even have to bring any valuable thing to Him other than your sincere heart to trust Him.

Let's stand up and pray.

If you want to be a born-again Christian, repeat after me, please.

"Heavenly Father, I confess that I am a sinner. Please forgive me for my sins. By faith, I believe that Jesus died for my sins, and rose again from death and is sitting at the right hand of the Father. Right now, I want to turn away from my sins and want to receive Jesus as my Lord and Savior into my heart. Please come into my heart. In Jesus' name, amen."

This time, I am going to talk to some of you who once came to the Lord Jesus. But you walked away from Him, because you wanted what the world could offer with sinful pleasure. God is waiting for you. Come back to Him. You have been gone so long. The loving Father in heaven is waiting for you.

For those who are coming back to God, please repeat after me:

"Heavenly Father, I confess that I walked away from you. Please forgive me for my sins. Please receive me and wash away all my sins and help me to be rooted and grounded in Your Word, so that I may never depart from You again. In Jesus' name, amen."