

What If I Miss Heaven?
John Dicus
Lorain Avenue Church of Christ (12/31/2023)

Good Morning!

This will be our last worship service of 2023. It has been a good year for our congregation. We've grown in so many ways. You have done the work, and God has given the increase. It's an honor for Eddie and myself to serve as your elders.

The lesson for today is the third of four lessons, "In My Father's House." We'll be building on the things we learned in the first two lessons.

I invite you to listen to the first two or view them, by going to our LA website. We also have text versions in English and Spanish.

This morning, I'm calling this lesson, "What If I Miss Heaven?" The subject matter is sobering. God intended it to be sobering.

When He created us in His own image, he endowed us with the ability to reason and choose. And we can't choose unless we have the information to make a wise choice.

Heaven or Hell. It is up to us.

Today we will ask and answer the question, "What if I miss Heaven?"

"What if I miss Heaven?" "What if?" - indeed. That would be THE greatest catastrophe. No second chance. No "do-over." No hope. No one to blame but our own self.

I noticed as I was typing these words into the lesson, that I had become quiet. Hesitant. Not hesitant because I did not know what to type. Hesitant because the thought became too real. Too terrible.

The thought is terrible. But having the thought is good. God wants us to know what is at stake.

In Luke 9:25, Jesus said, "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost?"

You are more familiar with the same statement Jesus made as recorded by Mark. Mark 8:36 says, "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?"

This scripture highlights what we have been studying in the past two lessons. Your soul is YOU. If you place material pursuits above service to God, you will lose your soul. YOU ... You will be destroyed.

As the lesson last week came to a close, we noted how marvelous it is that the Bible allows us to see beyond the tomb.

In allowing us to see beyond the grave, the Bible teaches us that the “who” we are in life is the “who” we will be after death; and the “who” we will be in Heaven.”

We have been given a specific identity, and we will keep that identity for all eternity.

The ability to see the path to Heaven through our Savior Jesus Christ gives us hope that never fades.

After comforting His disciples by telling them about the mansions in His Father’s House prepared for the faithful, He said, “You know the way to Heaven.”

Thomas was hesitant and asked for more information. Jesus answered and said, in John 14:6, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to Father except through Me.”

Only through Me.

After Jesus warned how foolish and fatal it is to love the things of this world more than God, He intensified the warning.

In Mark 8:38 He said, "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."

In Matthew 16:27 Jesus adds “I will recompense every man according to the deeds done while in the body.”

There are only two choices. There are only two places YOU can choose to live forever. Heaven or Hell. In My Father’s House, or ... in torment banished from God.

Drawing from our first two lessons, let me introduce “Ted.”

I need a name. If you are a Ted or know a Ted, any resemblance to a real person is purely coincidental.

Quite a few years ago, Ted was conceived and born of his parents. Ted is the name his parents gave him.

Ted is a likeable guy. Friendly. Caring. His mom and dad – Christians - have always had high hopes for him.

Ted became Ted when God formed him in the womb and gave him a human body during conception and birth. A sweet little baby.

The body Ted wears is the body he borrowed from God. That body has grown with Ted. Ted has learned as he has aged from birth. Ted has been taught by his parents and others. Ted has

been instructed in the Bible, the Word of God. He is more knowledgeable. He is wiser, or at least he should be.

Ted has learned about right and wrong, good and evil. Ted has learned to DISCERN right from wrong. He has learned that one must DO right and not do wrong. Hopefully, Ted has learned through practice, HOW to do right and not wrong.

Ted has learned that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

But Ted has not acted on that belief. Yet he knows many Scriptures teaching that salvation is possible only through baptism. He can quote scripture teaching that baptism forgives sins, such as Acts 2:38. Or scripture that clearly says that baptism saves, such as 1 Peter 3:21.

Ted understands that salvation means salvation from Hell.

But Ted has gotten caught up in the cares of living. Well past the age when he realized he should be baptized, Ted has failed to make time for God.

Life is a series of choices. And no matter how you might want to justify his behavior, Ted has chosen to NOT obey the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Perhaps he has placed that decision on hold until a more convenient time. Tomorrow.

Or perhaps Ted has rejected the command? There can be many variations on why Ted has failed to become a child of God in baptism.

Ted cannot call God his Father. He has no reservation in Heaven.

In 1 Peter 1:3-5 Peter said, that the hope of Heaven is for those who have been born anew from the waters of baptism. This hope has been made certain by Christ's resurrection. If Ted had become a Christian in baptism, and lived faithfully, he would have been guaranteed a reservation in Heaven.

But no! This did not happen.

Life beyond the grave looks grim for Ted.

The words of the hymns "Sing to Me Of Heaven" and "Whispering Hope" no longer grace his lips.

Failure to choose, is a choice. Older now, Ted has settled into his ways as much by habit as intention.

The borrowed body that Ted has been living in, is showing major signs of wear and tear. It's on its last legs, so to speak. Ted cannot exist in this life on earth without his borrowed body and he's fast approaching a crossroads.

Is Ted really going to say "goodbye" to that body, and to this earthly life, still in his unsaved condition? Or is he going to repent before it is too late?

Ted's body quits!

In our previous lessons we saw how the poor man, in Luke 16:19-31, fared when his body gave out. When he died.

Lazarus' body went to the grave and it began to decompose.

Lazarus was carried away by angels, to Hades, to rest beside Abraham. And with the faithful of all ages whose bodies had stopped working.

Gently carried to rest. Until the God-appointed time when Christ returns to take the faithful to His Father's House.

Ted is not with Abraham and Lazarus and all the faithful who have passed on.

Yes. Ted is in Hades, the place we can't see, where all go when their bodies stop working. He is in that holding place we've studied about.

But Ted is in an area of Hades that is separated from the area where Abraham is.

Ted is not being comforted. In fact, just the opposite. Ted is in Torments. Plural.

In the passage in Luke 16, we also read that a rich man who mistreated Lazarus while living, also died. His body went to the grave. But unlike Lazarus, he was not carried away to Hades to rest beside with Abraham. He was taken to another place in hades where he was tormented.

Let's read together from Luke 16:20-26:

"There was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at the rich man's gate, desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, the dogs came and licked his sores.

So it was that the beggar died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side.

The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus at his side.

Then he cried and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.'

But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and you are tormented.

And besides all this, between us and you there is a great fixed chasm, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.'"

Here we have a parting of the ways, so as to speak. The great parting of the ways.

Folks living together in this world, have now been separated in death. Those righteous, from the unrighteous. Those saved, from the lost. Those obedient to the Gospel of Christ, from the disobedient. The Children of God, from those outside the family of God. Those who lived faithful

lives until death, from those who fell away or turned back. Those who chose wisely, from those who never got around to choosing.

Ted might be separated in death from his best friend. Or from his wife if he married. Or from his parents. Forever.

Existing apart until Christ returns. The faithful at rest. The unfaithful in torments. No crossing over.

How long will that be? No one knows but the Father. After all, it's His House.

When Christ returns, all who are in Hades will be brought back to bodily life.

John 5:28-29 say, "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth; those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation." (In the graves meaning in Hades.)

Christ will call all back to life. All. The saved and the lost. Together they will stand before Christ. All will be judged.

In 2 Corinthians 5:10 Paul tells us, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due him for the things done in the body, whether good or bad."

All the unrighteous will be sentenced to Hell. Forever.

In Matthew 25:46 Jesus says, "Then the unrighteous will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

All the righteous will be rewarded with a home in Heaven. Forever.

As we said, all who are in Hades will be called back to bodily life. We won't have a body in Hades. Lazarus does not have a body. The rich man does not have a body. Abraham has not had a body for thousands of years. All in Hades have no bodies. We talked about his last week. Ted included, of course.

In 1 Corinthians 15:50-53, Paul speaks to what he refers to as a mystery. Hard to get our minds wrapped around for sure.

He tells us about a transition that goes something like this. Each of us will be called back to a temporary life that requires a body. This is prior to the earth passing away.

It appears that, by the power of God, we will be reunited with our old body, if even for a very brief time. And then that body will be changed into a new kind of body, a spiritual body, that equips us for an eternal, spiritual existence.

Now here is where a clear distinction is made between, say, Lazarus and Ted. Lazarus will be given a new spiritual body that fits him for life in our Father's House. Ted will, at least from what we can surmise, will be given a kind of spiritual body that fits him for eternal punishment.

Those who are comforted with Abraham and all the rest of the departed faithful will be raised in hope.

Those who share the fate of the unrighteous rich man, will be raised as well, however with no hope at all.

From the day Lazarus passed into Hades, he has been on an unbroken path to Heaven.

From the day Ted died, he has been on an unalterable path to Hell.

Paul says, in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, that “the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet call of God.”

First, the faithful in Hades will be raised. And then the living faithful will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.”

This joyous happening excludes Ted, and all others like him, who have made the choice to miss Heaven.

A preacher once remarked that if you are watching this from the ground then you are certainly doomed.

In our first two lessons we learned that the YOU that was born will be the YOU in Hades with Abraham and Lazarus, and the YOU that will be raised to eternal life in Heaven. This of course assumes YOU have chosen to be saved.

But now we can see, by observing Ted, what can happen to YOU if you make the same unwise choices Ted made.

Luke 13:27-28 reads, "But He will say, 'I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.' There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out.

All the faithful receiving their inheritance in My Father's House. And you, yourselves, thrown out.

This is what it will be like to “Miss Heaven,”

May it never be, that the YOU that was born becomes the YOU in Hades with the rich man and becomes the YOU that are raised to be sentenced and cast into Hell and outer darkness. Forever.

May it never be.

John wrote, in Revelation 20:12-15, “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.

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.

Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire.

And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.

Sobering.

Next week, the Lord willing, we will ask and answer the question, "Who will be in Heaven?"

Thank you for your kind attention.

Invitation

We will now extend the invitation of Christ to become a child of God in baptism having your sins washed away. The baptistry is ready.

This is also an opportunity for us to pray with you if you have fallen away and need to return to God in repentance and prayer.