

WHAT HOPE IS THERE FOR THE DEAD?

In Part 6 of the “*Good News From God*” brochure, published by the Watchtower Bible & Tract Society of Pennsylvania, the Society poses five questions: (1) What is the good news about the dead? (2) What is the condition of the dead? (3) Can the dead speak to us? (4) Who will return to life? and (5) What does the resurrection tell us about Jehovah?

The answers to these questions are important because they give the greatest glory to the Father’s purpose for man. When we harmonize these answers with the previous sections, the Father’s love become crystal clear, unambiguous and undisputed, and man’s greatest fear - the fear of personality extinction – dissipates into the wind.

1. What is the good news about the dead?

Before Jesus arrived, many Jews believed in a literal resurrection, or bringing one back from death to life again on earth at a future time that they called “the last day.” We know, based on the 11th chapter of the Gospel According to John, that Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus, believed in such a resurrection.

When Lazarus became ill and near death, Mary and Martha sent word to their friend Jesus. Jesus was out of town when he received news of Lazarus’ illness, and by the time Jesus arrived, Lazarus had died:

“Martha therefore said to Jesus: “Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died. And yet at present I know that as many things as you ask God for, God will give you.” Jesus said to her: “Your brother will rise.” Martha said to him: “I know he will rise in the resurrection on the last day.” – *John 11:21-24*

Unlike Martha, there were some Jews who did not believe in a resurrection. The Sadducees were among those. To them, the resurrection was ludicrous. On a prior occasion, they attempted to ridicule Jesus by presenting a convoluted story in order to demonstrate the unreasonableness of the resurrection. (*Mark 12:15-23*) In reply, Jesus said to them:

“Is not this why you are mistaken, your not knowing either the Scriptures or the power of God? For when they rise from the dead, neither do men marry nor are women given in marriage, **but are as angels in the heavens.**” – *Mark 12:23-25*

Jesus was educating them as to the resurrection, namely that it was not a bringing back to life of a human body, but a bringing back to life of the personality of the deceased person in a new body, a body like that of the angels. Jesus further emphasized the certainty of the resurrection:

“But concerning the dead, that they are raised up, did you not read in the book of Moses, in the account about the thornbush, how God said to him, **‘I am the God of Abraham and God of Isaac and God of Jacob’? He is a God, not of the dead, but of the living.** You are much mistaken.” – *Mark 12:23-27*

Jesus explained that though Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had died, God viewed them as alive because their resurrection was assured; it was guaranteed. If there was to be no resurrection of the dead, then God would not view them as living. Their lives would have been over, finished, with no hope.

It is true that when Jesus resurrected Lazarus, he brought him back to life in his previous human body. But the resurrection of Lazarus was not the type of resurrection Jesus promised his followers. The resurrection of Lazarus had a particular purpose.

“Therefore his sisters dispatched word to him, saying: “Lord, see! the one for whom you have affection is sick.” But when Jesus heard it he said: **This sickness is not with death as its object**, but is for the glory of God, in order **that the Son of God may be glorified through it.**” – *John 11:4*

Yes, Lazarus’ resurrection was to demonstrate the **power** of God, to show that the Son of God had the authority even to bring life back into a body. We also know Lazarus’ death was not the type of resurrection Jesus promised because Lazarus eventually died again, likely of the same illness that took his life the first time.

As to the resurrection Jesus promised, speaking again to Martha, Jesus said:

“I am the resurrection and the life. He that exercises faith in me, even though he dies, will come to life; and everyone that is living and exercises faith in me will never die at all. Do you believe this?” She said to him: “Yes, Lord; I have believed that you are the Christ the Son of God, the One coming into the world.” – *John 11:24-27*

Those who die as followers of Christ are assured a resurrection, just as sure as the resurrections of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And at a particular time in the future, Jesus said that those who exercise faith in him who are alive would not die at all. This was a promise of everlasting life, unlike Lazarus’ resurrection, though we have every reason to believe that when Lazarus is resurrected in the future, he will attain the true resurrection.

Jesus openly and repeatedly taught that those who exercised faith in him, while they were still alive, were given everlasting life – a resurrection guarantee:

“Most truly I say to you, He that believes **has everlasting life.**” – *John 6:47*

“**This means everlasting life**, their **taking in knowledge** of you, the only true God, and of the one whom you sent forth, Jesus Christ.” – *John 17:3*

“Most truly I say to you, He that **hears** my word and **believes** him that sent me **has everlasting life**, and he does not come into judgment but has passed over from death to life.” – *John 5:24*

“And this is the witness given, that God **gave us** everlasting life, and **this life is in his Son**. He that has the Son **has** this life; he that does not have the Son of God does not have this life. I write you

these things that you may know that **you have** life everlasting, you who put your faith in the name of the Son of God.” *1 John 5:11-13*

All those who die in union with Jesus Christ, the Father views as living. They have a guarantee that they will live again, but not in a strife-torn world, nor in a corruptible body. They will get a hold on the real life – life in the heavenly kingdom!

“Give orders to those who are rich in the present system of things not to be high-minded, and to rest their hope, not on uncertain riches, but on God, who furnishes us all things richly for our enjoyment; to work at good, to be rich in fine works, to be liberal, ready to share, safely treasuring up for themselves a fine foundation for the future, in order **that they may get a firm hold on the real life.**” – *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

This is the good news about the dead. For those who exercise faith, death is temporary and unfolds into the glorious eternal heavenly career.

For further discussion, please see: **Everlasting Life Now!**

2. What is the condition of the dead?

In order to understand the condition of the dead, we should first consider the condition of the living. The human being is a composite of various component parts: a body, a mind, a personality, and the indwelling divine spirit of the Father.

The **body** was formed from the elements of the earth and is actuated by the breath of life, just as are the animals. We learn in Genesis:

“And Jehovah God proceeded to form the man out of dust from the ground and to blow into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man came to be a living soul.” – *Genesis 2:7*

Our brain is a part of our body. It itself does not think; it is simply an organ – like our liver, heart, and lungs are organs. The function of the brain is to collect, sort and store data. It is different from the mind.

The **mind** remains an unexplained phenomena that reacts to the external and internal stimuli received and processed by the brain. It is the thinking part of man that experiences consciousness – the ability to know and be known. The mind accesses the data stored in the brain and has the ability to reason, learn and profit from experiences; thus, the mind has creative potential.

Animals have limited mind function; they cannot experience the higher aspects of mind, such as the capacity for spirit receptivity, and the ability to worship.

“Yet these [men] are speaking abusively of all the things they really do not know; but all the things that they do understand naturally **like the unreasoning animals**, in these things they go on corrupting themselves.” – *Jude 1:10*

The **personality** is a unique gift from the Father. No two personalities are exactly alike. In the resurrection, when we are raised in a new body, it is our personality that survives and that identifies us. Whereas mind can recognize another person, personality determines how to relate to and communicate with that person. Personality is endowed with morality and is the part of man that makes the decisions as to how to respond to moral opportunities and dilemmas:

“For if we have become united with him in the likeness of his death, we shall certainly also be [united with him in the likeness] of his resurrection; **because we know that our old personality was impaled with [him]**, that our sinful body might be made inactive, that we should no longer go on being slaves to sin. For he who has died has been acquitted from [his] sin.” – *Romans 6:5-6*

A good example of the difference between mind and personality is when two people observe the same event, but come away with two different interpretations of what happened. Both minds see the event and process the data surrounding the event. But the divergent personalities characterize and color the meaning of the event and determine how to relate to it.

Personality is the part of us with the ability to choose to do or not do the divine will.

“Do not be lying to one another. Strip off the old personality with its practices, and clothe yourselves with the new [personality], which through accurate knowledge is **being made new according to the image of the One who created it.**” – *Colossians 3:9-10*

”But you did not learn the Christ to be so, provided, indeed, that you heard him and were taught by means of him, just as truth is in Jesus, that you should **put away the old personality** which conforms to your former course of conduct and which is being corrupted **according to his deceptive desires**; but that you should be made new in **the force actuating your mind**, and should put on the new personality **which was created according to God’s will** in true righteousness and loyalty.” – *Ephesians 4:20-24*

Accordingly, our personality is our authentic self. The part of us we are referring to when we say “I” or “me.” It is the part of us that wants to live on forever; the part that we so desperately seek to preserve alive. Personality survival is the impetus for memorial services, monuments, memorial tombs, and the like. It is the part that we, unknowingly, plead for God to hold on to, as did certain Bible writers:

“Do **remember me**, O my God, concerning this, and do not wipe out my acts of loving-kindness that I have performed in connection with the house of my God and the guardianship of it.” – *Nehemiah 13:14*

“At that time those in fear of Jehovah spoke with one another, each one with his companion, and Jehovah kept paying attention and listening. **And a book of remembrance began to be written up** before him for those in fear of Jehovah and for those thinking upon his name.” – *Malachi 3:16*

“And he went on to say: “Jesus, **remember me** when you get into your kingdom.” And he said to him: “Truly I tell you today, You will be with me in Paradise.” – *Luke 23:42-43*

And finally, the human is endowed with the **indwelling spirit fragment of the Father**.

“Do you not know that you people are God’s temple, and that the spirit of God dwells in you?” – *1 Corinthians 3:16*

“What! Do you not know that the body of you people is [the] temple of the holy spirit within you, which you have from God?” – *1 Corinthians 6:19*

This is the actual presence of the Father that indwells our minds. It is the “force actuating our minds.” Our personality is developed through the united function of the mind and this indwelling spirit of the Father.

Having identified the parts that make up the living human being, we can determine the condition of the human being when he dies.

The body is part of the earth, so at death it returns to the earth; it does not go to heaven:

“In the sweat of your face you will eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken. **For dust you are and to dust you will return.**” – *Genesis 3:19*

The mind, the seat of consciousness, ceases to function at death:

“For the living are conscious that they will die; but **as for the dead, they are conscious of nothing at all**, neither do they anymore have wages, because the remembrance of them has been forgotten. Also, their love and their hate and their jealousy have already perished, and they have no portion anymore to time indefinite in anything that has to be done under the sun.” – *Ecclesiastes 9:5-6*

The indwelling spirit leaves the dead body and returns to the Father:

“His spirit goes out, he goes back to his ground; In that day his thoughts do perish.” – *Psalms 146:4*

“Then the dust returns to the earth just as it happened to be and **the spirit itself returns to the [true] God who gave it.**” – *Ecclesiastes 12:7*

That leaves only the personality, the identity of the person. We learn that the personality is recorded in God’s Book of Remembrance, the Book of Life. (*Malachi 3:16; Revelation 20:15*)

These facts conclusively show that at death there is no tormenting nor any hellfire for those who are disapproved. Tormenting requires a body to sense pain, a consciousness to be aware of the punishment, an a personality that can understand why it is being tortured. Further, eternal torment requires the person be gifted with everlasting life. But we know that everlasting

life is a gift from God to those exercising faith in Jesus Christ. No, the penalty for failure to exercise faith and choosing to do the Father's will is personality extinction, non-existence, nothing more:

“For the wages sin pays is death, but the gift God gives is everlasting life by Christ Jesus our Lord.” – **Romans 6:23**

And from the information in Part 2, we know that God is loving, even the personification of love and therefore could have no part in tormenting his children. If we read scriptures that seem to indicate that the Father would engage in such unimaginable conduct, the reader must consider the context. Is it an illustration, a parable? Is it a tool used to explain matters to the Jewish mind? Or could it result from a failure to properly understand the words in the scripture? This type of examination will clear up the matter and uphold the Father's love and mercy.

3. Can the dead speak to us?

Based on all of the above, the Bible definitively argues that the answer is, no, not as long as they remain in the death state. All communicative facilities have either perished or are inactive.

4. Who will return to life?

The Father's provision for life is generous. We read:

“For God loved the world so much that he gave his only-begotten Son, in order that **everyone exercising faith** in him might not be destroyed but have everlasting life.” – **John 3:16**

“For this is the will of my Father, that **everyone that beholds the Son and exercises faith** in him should have everlasting life, and I will resurrect him at the last day.” – **John 6:40**

“Jehovah is not slow respecting his promise, as some people consider slowness, but he is patient with you because he does not desire any to be destroyed but **desires all to attain to repentance.**” – **2 Peter 3:9**

Even those who have doctrinal errors, but have faith in God and in Christ can be saved:

“For no man can lay any other foundation than what is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood materials, hay, stubble, each one's work will become manifest, for the day will show it up, because it will be revealed by means of fire; and the fire itself will prove what sort of work each one's is. If anyone's work that he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward; **if anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, but he himself will be saved**; yet, if so, [it will be] as through fire.” – **1 Corinthians 3:11-15**

And though we are told that the road leading to life is narrow (*Matthew 7:13-14*), based on the above scriptures, we know it is certainly wide enough for all those who desire life.

Finally, Jesus said:

“Do not marvel at this, because the hour is coming in which **all those in the memorial tombs** will hear his voice and come out, those who did good things to a resurrection of life, those who practiced vile things to a resurrection of judgment.” – *John 5:28-29*

And the Apostle Paul stated:

“I have hope toward God, which hope these [men] themselves also entertain, that there is going to be a resurrection of **both the righteous and the unrighteous.**” – *Acts 24:15*

Clearly, there may be many more people resurrected than we would think. So it is unwise to make a definitive statement as to who will **not** be resurrected. But we can say that those who exercise faith in Christ are assured a resurrection. We can take it for granted (yes, we said take it for granted) that all sons of the Kingdom will be resurrected. As sons, we can then focus on our service to mankind, the ministry of reconciliation (*1 Corinthians 5:18-20*), and help others gain their own survival guarantee.

5. What does the resurrection tell us about Jehovah?

The resurrection tells us that our continued existence is important to the Father. It tells us that the Father has more in store for us than living a normal human life on earth – marrying, having children, getting a job, and amusing ourselves with various forms of entertainment.

“Eye has not seen and ear has not heard, neither have there been conceived in the heart of man the things that God has prepared for those who love him.” – *1 Corinthians 2:9*

When we think of what must be involved in bringing back to life the personalities of millions, maybe billions, of people and creating new incorruptible bodies for them, and the number of angelic and spirit personalities that must be involved in such an undertaking, we are humbled at the realization that we are such a major and central part of the Father’s universal purpose.

Overall, the resurrection assures us of the Father’s endless love, His divine mercy, His infinite wisdom, His unequalled generosity, His enduring patience, His inherent righteousness, His eternal foresight, His absolute power, His ultimate supremacy, His everlasting goodness, and His undisputed justice. Amen.

We welcome your comments.

“Elaia Luchnia”