

Regarding The State Of The Unsaved At Death



Introduction:

Does the Bible teach that the souls of the unsaved at death are kept under punishment until their resurrection or are they in some state of soul sleep? We will not present a definite conclusion in this paper, but rather just some information about what people believe and why.

Luke 16 - the story of the rich man and Lazarus:

Based on Luke 16:19-26 and Revelation 20:13-15 some people believe that the unsaved are kept in a state of torment until their resurrection.

Luke 16:19 - "There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: 20 And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, 21 And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. 22 And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; 23 And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. 24 And 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. 25 But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. 26 And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence."

Looking at Luke 16, can we be sure that it is NOT a parable? We know from scripture that the dead (saved and unsaved) do not have physical bodies until the second resurrection (John 5:28-29, 1 Cor 15:42-44) and yet the rich man had a physical body from the description given in the account of Luke 16.

John 5:28 - "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, 29 And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation."

1 Cor 15:42 - "So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in

corruption; it is raised in incorruption: 43 It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: 44 It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body."

This should be enough evidence to prove that Luke 16 is just a parable if it was describing an event prior to the second resurrection. And we know that it was describing an event prior to the second resurrection since the rich man wanted God to send someone back to earth to warn his brothers who were still alive.

Revelation 20:13 - the dead are in 'death and hell':

Rev 20:13-15 - "13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. 14 And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. 15 And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire."

John Gill's commentary on this passage states:

"and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them"; "death", which is here represented as a person, and elsewhere as a king, reigning and having power over men, signifies death in general, and every kind of death of which men have died, whether natural or violent, over whom it will now have no longer dominion, but will be obliged to deliver up all its subjects; and "hell" signifies the grave, which will now be opened, and deliver up all its prisoners, all that have been buried in the earth;"

It appears that Revelation 20:13-15 provides little information about the **state** of the unsaved prior to the resurrection of their bodies, so we really have just Luke 16 for evidence to substantiate the belief that the unsaved dead are in torment prior to Judgment Day.

Revelation chapter 20 and the resurrection of damnation:

Revelation 20:4-6 seems to indicate that the unsaved dead are just 'dead', in a state of soul sleep, awaiting **the resurrection of damnation** mentioned in John 5:29:

Rev 20:4 - "And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the

witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received *his* mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. 5 **But the rest of the dead lived not again until** the thousand years were finished. This *is* the first resurrection. 6 Blessed and holy *is* he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years."

The "problem" with using the above passage from Revelation 20 is that it speaks of the "thousand years" (in verse 5) and so for those who preach a literal futuristic "millennial kingdom" on earth, the phrase "the rest of the dead lived not again until" is not seen as a reference to the state of all the unsaved dead from the beginning of creation but as something else, namely the state of people who died during the time period of the "millennial kingdom". Once we make a wrong conclusion about the millennial kingdom in verse 5, we are going to make a wrong conclusion about the "first resurrection" in verse 6. We will think that "first resurrection" is the "rapture" that many people believe is supposed to occur before the start of the "millennial kingdom". But what if the "first resurrection" is just the point at which a believer becomes saved as alluded to here:

Romans 6:4 Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so **we also should walk in newness of life.**

Colossians 2:12 Buried with him in baptism, wherein also **ye are risen with him** through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.

Colossians 3:1 If **ye then be risen with Christ**, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.

Ephesians 2:5 Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) 6 And **hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places** in Christ Jesus

So then, "having a part in the first resurrection" is for those who are "blessed and holy" which simply refers to those who are redeemed, the elect of God, those whom God has chosen to be a people unto himself:

Psalms 65:4 **Blessed is the man whom thou chooseth**, and causet to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple.

Believers have a part in the first resurrection because Christ raises up their

spiritually dead souls and makes them new creatures in Christ that they might partake of the work God has laid out for them from before the foundation of the world.

John 5:28: The Resurrection of Damnation:

In John 5:28 shown below, since we know that believers are with Christ, the phrase “all that are in the graves” must simply be another way of saying “everyone who ever died”. And the point being made is about the physical resurrection of everyone, not that souls of all the dead are in the grave until that time.

John 5:28 - “Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, 29 And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto **the resurrection of life**; and they that have done evil, unto **the resurrection of damnation**.”

Believers at death go immediately to be with Christ in Heaven:

Based on Luke 23:43 and 2 Cor 5:8 we know **believers** at death are ushered into the presence of the Lord - minus their resurrected bodies.

Luke 23: 43 - “And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, **To day shalt thou be with me in paradise**.”

2Cor 5:8 - “We are confident, *I say*, and willing rather **to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord**.”

Which of the dead “know not any thing”?

Knowing that ONLY believers go to be with the Lord at the moment of death, the verses listed below could only be referring to the **unsaved** dead, NOT the **saved** dead:

Eccl 9:5 - “For the living know that they shall die: but **the dead know not any thing**, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. 6 **Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished**; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any *thing* that is done under the sun. — 10 Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do *it* with thy might; **for** , whither thou goest.”

Psa 146:3 - “Put not your trust in princes, *nor* in the son of man, in whom *there is* no help. 4 His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; **in that**

very day his thoughts perish.”

If the above verses from Ecclesiastes and the Psalms are referring to the unsaved dead, isn't the Bible saying that the unsaved dead are in the grave in a state of soul sleep, awaiting the resurrection of damnation? And if this is not the case, then what do those verses in Ecclesiastes and Psalms refer to?

John Gill's commentary on Psalm 146:4 says:

in that very day his thoughts perish; in the day, hour, and moment he dies: not that the soul ceases, or ceases to think at death; it is immortal, and dies not; and, as it exists in a separate state after death, it retains all its powers and faculties, and, among the rest, its power of thinking; which it is capable of exercising, and does, as appears from the case of the souls under the altar, #Rev 6:9.”

Gill's reference to Revelation 6:9 only accounts for the souls of the redeemed, not the unsaved:

Rev 6:9 – “And when he had opened the fifth seal, **I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God**, and for the testimony which they held”

The unsaved dead go down into silence:

Here are two verses from the Psalms that tend to indicate the unsaved dead are asleep in the grave awaiting the resurrection of the damned:

Psa 115:17 – “The dead praise not the LORD, neither any that go down into silence.”

Surely the spiritually dead do not praise the Lord and so the above verse would apply to them rather than to the saved. Only the unsaved dead could “go down in silence” because the souls in heaven are praising God.

Psa 6:5 – “For in death *there is* no remembrance of thee: in the grave who shall give thee thanks?”

Looking at Psalm 6:5 with Luke 16 in mind (which speaks of a man who died lost and was very conscious of God), only a state of “soul sleep” would account for the dead having no remembrance of God. Likewise, the unsaved do not have a thankful attitude towards God either in this life or the next, so Psalm 6:5 must only be talking about the unsaved.

Concluding Remarks:

A person's main concern should be the state of his soul with respect to salvation. Even if the unsaved dead are in a state of soul sleep until Judgment

Day, that Judgment Day will come:

Heb 9:27 - "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this **the judgment**"

2Pet 2:9 - "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto **the day of judgment to be punished**"

2Pet 3:7 - "But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against **the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.**"

Matt 12:36 - "But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in **the day of judgment.**"

If the unsaved are in a state of sleep, it will appear to them, when they awake, as if they had just died since that is the last thing they would have remembered and experienced anyway.

What about YOU? Where will YOU be spending eternity?
