

Questions about the Afterlife

Insights into Eternity - Session Five

Warm Up Question: What was the best vacation that you have been on, what was it that made it wonderful?....or, where would you like to go on vacation and why?

When thinking of eternity and what the afterlife will be like, many people have asked questions that I would like to address. Here are just a few of the most commonly asked questions that I have been sent:

Will our pets be with us?

Do pets have the blessing of eternity, and will my pet be in heaven when I arrive?

This is a very important question for some people, especially considering the fact that animals can be such an important part of our families. Does an animal have a soul that can survive death's door? I think it is clear that animals have a soul. What do we mean by the word *soul*? Most bible teachers use the word *soul* to describe the mind, will and emotions. A man's spirit being the part of his nature that connects him to God. Animals think and have reasoning powers, they feel, they learn things etc. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for soul is *nephesh*. It is the word used when God created animals:

²⁴ And God said, "Let the land produce living (*nephesh*) creatures according to their kinds: livestock, creatures that move along the ground, and wild animals, each according to its kind." And it was so (Genesis 1:24).

The word *nephesh* is also used in Genesis 1:30, where we are told that the creatures that move on the ground have the breath (*nephesh*) of life. It is clear that the word *nephesh* is a word that is translated soul for David, in writing Psalm 16 says, "For thou wilt not leave my *soul* (*nephesh*) in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption" (Psalm 16:10 KJV). There obviously are great differences between an animal soul and a human soul. They do not have a conscience, which I believe to be a part of man's spiritual make up, man being composed of a body, soul and spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:23), but it seems as if they are

accountable in some way to God. There is a passage in Genesis chapter 9 where God says:

⁵ "I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from each man, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man." (Genesis 9:5)

Why would God hold an animal to account if there wasn't an ability to live beyond the grave? If there is to be an accounting for every animal doesn't that seem as if they also will survive death and live eternally? We know that animals will have a place in the new earth:

²⁵ The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, but dust will be the serpent's food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain," says the LORD (Isaiah 65:25).

From this passage it is obvious that the soul of the animals will be changed in some way, for it is just not natural for a lamb and a wolf to eat grass together and for animals not to harm one another. The whole order of creation will be changed. If that is true for the new earth then why do we think that heaven would be any different? I do believe that we will see our pets in heaven. I cannot imagine a heaven without our beloved pets.

¹⁹ The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. ²² We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time (Romans 8:19-22).

The inner longing of all the animal kingdom is for the changing of their nature, which I believe will take place at the time of the resurrection of the saints.

What happens to people who commit suicide?

We are told in the Ten Commandments that we shall not murder (Exodus 20:13). We do not belong to ourselves (1 Corinthians 6:20), so what gives us the right to take our own lives? Each of us has been created for a reason and we have no right to end our lives, and we are in danger of judgment if we do so. Having said that, God knows our reasoning and our motives and why a person abruptly ends their lives. He is perfectly just in his judgment, and so it would be wrong for us to make a judgment as to where a person who commits suicide goes in eternity. I cannot answer this one except to say that I believe God, who knows each person intimately, will judge each one individually.

Is it okay to talk to those who have passed on? Can they talk to us or come to us in dreams or visions?

I believe it is very wrong and terribly dangerous to one's eternal soul to have interaction with those that are disembodied spirits.

¹⁰ Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, ¹¹ or casts spells, or who is **a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead.** ¹² Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD, and because of these detestable practices the LORD your God will drive out those nations before you (Deuteronomy 18:10-12).

The King James Version uses the words *familiar spirits* to describe a person in touch with spirits that are disembodied (biblegateway.com brings up 15 occurrences in the scriptures). These evil spirits masquerade as dear departed family members, which is why they are called familiar spirits (as in family). In American Indian culture one would call upon his ancestors to find direction from the world beyond. But these spirits are not those of the family that have died and gone on, but evil spirits assigned by satan to a family to make sure that they are kept in bondage to invisible dark evil forces. In many Asian cultures the 'ancestors' demanded sacrifices to appease them but these sacrifices were made to demons, not to family members that had departed:

¹⁷ They sacrificed to demons, which are not God— gods they had not known, gods that recently appeared, gods your fathers did not fear (Deuteronomy 32:17).

After King Saul had devoted the rest of his life to putting to death God's chosen king, David, there was

a point where God would not give him any direction through prayer or through prophetic words. Being in a desperate place, he took the terrible step of seeking answers from a medium that would consult a spirit. Samuel the prophet had died some time before and King Saul went to the medium and asked her if she would bring up the spirit of Samuel:

¹¹ Then the woman asked, "Whom shall I bring up for you?" "Bring up Samuel," he said. ¹² When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out at the top of her voice and said to Saul, "Why have you deceived me? You are Saul!" ¹³ The king said to her, "Don't be afraid. What do you see?" The woman said, "I see a spirit coming up out of the ground." ¹⁴ "What does he look like?" he asked. "An old man wearing a robe is coming up," she said. Then Saul knew it was Samuel, and he bowed down and prostrated himself with his face to the ground. ¹⁵ Samuel said to Saul, "Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?" "I am in great distress," Saul said. "The Philistines are fighting against me, and God has turned away from me. He no longer answers me, either by prophets or by dreams. So I have called on you to tell me what to do" (1 Samuel 28:11-15. Emphasis mine).

You may wonder why I am referring to this passage. I find verse 12 very interesting for this reason; it is clear that the woman didn't see what she normally saw. She was obviously shocked by the spirit that came before her and knew instantly that the person with her was Saul, who had already expelled all the mediums in the land (1 Samuel 28:3). What did she see that shocked her? I believe that it really was Samuel and not what she was expecting, a demon masquerading as a departed person. When people practice a séance, they are talking with demons. These demons often are very deceptive in their masquerade due to their knowledge about intimate details often between a loved one that is departed and one that is still on earth. If you have practiced consulting demons in a séance, they usually have made inroads into a persons life in different ways, my advice is to get together with some members of an intercessory prayer team and have all spiritual ties and bonds cut.

Is cremation of the body after death acceptable according to God's Word?

Our God is a God of creation. I do not see any difficulty for our God, who made the Universe through His words, to give a person his resurrection body because he was cremated. Is anything too hard for the

Lord? (Jeremiah 32:27). During the Middle Ages when the plague wiped out nearly a third of the population of Europe, I'm sure that there were many of God's saints whose bodies were burned so that the plague could be ended. We know that many saints were burned at the stake also for their testimony of Jesus. It does not matter what state a person's body is in when God will move in His Resurrection power. Our bodies will be recreated into heavenly bodies, not simply restored.

Will we remember our life on earth when we are in heaven?

Absolutely! Jesus tells us about the conversation between Abraham and the rich man in Luke 16:25, where Abraham says, "Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things..." There are things that we learn on Earth that cannot be learned in heaven or in the new earth. I can't believe that lessons we have learned in overcoming our sin nature will not be remembered and not be a part of our character in heaven. My past life of sin shapes my character today because I fear going back there when I remember how sin managed to get a hold of my life. It is good for all of us to reflect on the person we used to be outside of our relationship to Christ and His saving power in our lives. Our memories help to form our character. God spends a lifetime in shaping our character. Although I believe a further transformation also occurs when we go to be with the Lord (We will shine like the stars forever and ever, Daniel 12:3), I believe our character lives on as part of "who we are" in eternity. It is what makes us all unique. The forming of our character comes at a great price, and it is precious to God. Author Randy Alcorn in his book, *Heaven*, has these words to say about remembering our lives in this world:

"One writer claims, 'We will not even remember this old world we call Earth...nor will we even recall it! It simply will not come into our minds.' This common misconception confuses people. They think we won't remember our earthly lives, including the relationships so precious to us. This view that we will not remember our present lives usually comes from the interpretation of this scripture: Isaiah 65:17; 'Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.' However, this verse should be viewed in context. It's linked to the previous verse, in which God says, 'For the past troubles

will be forgotten and hidden from my eyes.'" This doesn't suggest literal lack of memory, as if the omniscient God couldn't recall the past. Rather, it's like God's comment to Jeremiah: "I will remember their sins no more" (Jeremiah 31:34). It means that God chooses not to bring up our past sins or hold them against us. ¹

The Millennium.

In the last session we talked about the resurrection of the saints at the Return of Christ. We read that those that were born again and walking with Christ received an imperishable body, a body of power that is immortal. This body will be like Christ's resurrection body, a body that had been sown in dishonor, but raised in glory (1 Corinthians 15:43). The saints we are told will reign with Christ for a thousand years (Revelation 20:4-6) and satan will be bound and thrown into the Abyss (Revelation 20:3).

¹ And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. ² He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. ³ He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time. ⁴ I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. ⁵ (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. ⁶ Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years (Revelation 20:1-6).

What do you think it will be like to live on planet Earth with satan bound in chains during the Millennium (1000 years)? How will that affect us?

There will be no more war until the 1000 years are up and then satan must be released for a time. Until that time he is kept in the *Abyss* (Greek word is *Abussos*, a word that means bottomless, unfathomed; enor-

¹ Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*, Published by Tyndale, Page 331.

mous; unbounded; immeasurable depth). There will be no temptation towards evil and sin. Our resurrection bodies will take away all fear of harm. Our sin nature will be taken away and there will be no desire to sin at all. There will be no fear of death.

What would you like to do in those 1000 years that you haven't been able to do in this life?

² In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. ³ Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. ⁴ He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore (Isaiah 2:2-4).

Imagine living on planet Earth where the Lord Jesus Christ is reigning on His throne in Jerusalem. There will be no economic need for tanks, guns and planes. Christ Jesus will set up His own government on Earth composed of the saints. Every nation will be at peace with one another with King Jesus sitting on His throne. Those that are reigning over nations, territories, states, cities and towns are those who have been counted worthy because of their faithfulness in resisting evil and caring for God's people. I believe it will be a time of great economic prosperity to all those living on planet earth. We are further told that Jerusalem itself will be raised higher than the mountains around it. At the moment, one can look down on Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives on the east side. It certainly sounds as if Jerusalem itself will be raised through some geological happening.

The King, the Lord Jesus Christ, will teach us of His ways and settle any remaining disputes between nations. We are told that the New Jerusalem does not come down to Earth from above until the 1000 years are over (Revelation 21:1-2). Until that point the throne of King Jesus is in Jerusalem, where many peoples will come to praise and worship King Jesus (Isaiah 2:2-3). Isaiah the prophet says, "Your eyes will see the king in his beauty and view a land that stretches afar" (Isaiah 33:17). Can you imagine sitting at the feet of Jesus while He teaches

us His ways? He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths" (Isaiah 2:3).

What will determine the rank of leadership and rulership of those ruling and reigning with Christ?

Certainly character will have a lot to do with it but Jesus also gave us a parable to illustrate who will be counted worthy of high leadership responsibility in the Millennium or the New Earth:

The Parable of the Ten Minas

¹¹ While they were listening to this, he went on to tell them a parable, because he was near Jerusalem and the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once. ¹² He said: "A man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed king and then to return. ¹³ So he called ten of his servants and gave them ten minas. 'Put this money to work,' he said, 'until I come back.' ¹⁴ "But his subjects hated him and sent a delegation after him to say, 'We don't want this man to be our king.' ¹⁵ "He was made king, however, and returned home. Then he sent for the servants to whom he had given the money, in order to find out what they had gained with it. ¹⁶ "The first one came and said, 'Sir, your mina has earned ten more.' ¹⁷ "'Well done, my good servant!' his master replied. 'Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.' ¹⁸ "The second came and said, 'Sir, your mina has earned five more.' ¹⁹ "His master answered, 'You take charge of five cities.' ²⁰ "Then another servant came and said, 'Sir, here is your mina; I have kept it laid away in a piece of cloth. ²¹ I was afraid of you, because you are a hard man. You take out what you did not put in and reap what you did not sow.' ²² "His master replied, 'I will judge you by your own words, you wicked servant! You knew, did you, that I am a hard man, taking out what I did not put in, and reaping what I did not sow? ²³ Why then didn't you put my money on deposit, so that when I came back, I could have collected it with interest?' ²⁴ "Then he said to those standing by, 'Take his mina away from him and give it to the one who has ten minas.' ²⁵ "'Sir,' they said, 'he already has ten!' ²⁶ "He replied, 'I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but as for the one who has nothing, even what he has will be taken away. ²⁷ But those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them—bring them here and kill them in front of me'" (Luke 19:11-27).

The purpose of the parable is about what should go on in the meantime, while we wait for King Jesus to return and sit on His throne. What are His servants to be doing while He is away? Before he leaves, the noble-

man gives ten of his servant's one mina each. A mina was a unit of currency, worth about 3 month's wages at the time.

What do you think the mina and the servants represent?

This Parable of the Ten Minas seems to be similar to the Parable of the Talents. There is one important difference; the same amount is given to each person. In the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30), one is given five talents, another two, and another one. A Talent was a unit of currency. It was a very valuable unit, usually a weight of Gold or silver. We can see these talents as representing our own gifts, abilities, knowledge and finances, in short, our total resources. Some are given more talents and abilities than others, and are accountable to God for what they have received from Him. The parable of the minas is different. Each person was given an equal amount, just one mina. This one mina could represent that which is given to all of us in an equal amount, the stewardship of the message of the Gospel.

¹⁶ I am not ashamed of the **gospel**, because **it is the power of God** for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile (Romans 1:16).

The gospel is the most powerful thing on planet earth. The message of God's love, mercy and grace toward to all mankind is a sacred trust that rests on all who believe to do what we can to spread this message.

⁴ On the contrary, we speak as men **approved** by God to be **entrusted with the gospel**. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts (1 Thessalonians 2:4 Emphasis mine).

The word approved in the above verse is the Greek word *dokimazo*, it means to test something to prove whether it is worthy. God allows us to go through the fiery trial of testing so that we may be counted worthy to carry the sacred trust of the gospel to others. The tests of God are designed to refine us so that we can be trusted truth-bearers.

If the gospel is represented by the mina given to each of the ten servants, what is meant by the phrase, "Put this money to work until I come back?"

Every Christian has a responsibility to spread the gospel in any way they can. We cannot keep it to ourselves. The Greek word that is translated by the phrase, "put this money to work" (NIV) or "occupy" (KJV) is *pragmateuomai*. It means to pragmatically do business. It speaks of investing or trading in an efficient, sensible way with a view to bringing a return on the investment. I can't imagine someone who found a cure for cancer keeping it to themselves. It would be a crime against humanity. In the same way, we have been given a cure for the cancer of the soul. When we believe the gospel and receive the grace of Christ into our lives, God wants us to also share with others what we have received. We are to do what we can to promote the gospel, seeking to pragmatically spend our resources in a business like way, investing wisely in the Kingdom of God.

Can you think of practical ways that you can further invest your time, energy and talents to build the Kingdom of God? Thinking in terms of investment and return, what are some wise ways to invest?

In verse 24, the mina that was kept in a sweat cloth or handkerchief was given to the one who had gained ten. Obviously the master gave the ten minas back to the man so that he now had 11. The master didn't need the money. It is obvious from the text that the increase on the master's investment was kept by each of the two men with a reward as well. The one who did nothing had no reward and no investment seed money either. There were no other penalties or punishment for his lack of investment, as shown in this passage. I just think he was sorry that he did nothing. The man who did nothing gives us an example of the type of believer who will get to heaven, but has laid up little treasure in heaven for his "home coming" (1 Corinthians 3:12-15).

¹⁹ "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Matthew 6:19-21).

If the noble master did not really want to keep the return on his investment, what was the purpose in giving them seed money, asking them to invest and do business with it?

The noble master was not interested with the money itself; he calls it “a very small matter” in verse 17. To a King, what is three months wages of a common worker? It was simply a test to see the level of their faithfulness in using what they had been given, their investment opportunity. He wanted to find out who amongst his servants valued increasing their master’s kingdom and wealth. He needed to find people who would be faithful in small matters so that he could give them greater responsibility when he returned.

The master seemed delighted and full of praise for the one who brought a 1000% return on his investment. He said to him “Well done, my good servant!” (Verse 17).

What are your thoughts concerning the reward that was given? There is a vast difference between three months wages and whole cities!

What would be the combined income of ten cities in America? It seems a vastly different amount to the value of ten minas. The use of a city perhaps, is one way of showing the disproportionate amount rewarded for the energy, time and money invested by the first two people. I believe that God is showing us that:

⁹ “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9 Emphasis mine)

You may say; “it sure sounds like a lot of work

to be in charge of ten cities! I would like to live out my days resting in Bermuda or Hawaii. To take charge over ten cities is not a reward that I would like!” I see this responsibility for ten cities as a reward of trust. It speaks of closeness and of relationship with the Master. Who does the CEO of any major company hang out with? In any healthy organization, it would be his top executives. In the same way we will be working and relating in close proximity to our Master, the Lord Jesus Christ. What a joy that will be! The idea of a city implies to me that there will responsibility and authority, as we have a share in His rulership in the Kingdom of Heaven. The idea of a city simply helps us in terms of our understanding. The passage says that our mind cannot conceive of what God has got planned for those who love Him. It seems that the one who gained tenfold on his investment went at it with all his heart. We will see, in retrospect, those things that are truly important in God’s economy. Let’s learn that lesson now while there is still time to apply it! What is important in God’s economy? Look at the life of Jesus for that answer. He spent His life investing in people. We too need to invest our time in people, and especially those that are without Christ in this world.

Prayer: Please God, open our eyes to see heavenly treasure and give us vision to understand what a difference we can make in our own lives and in the lives of others. Show us ways to invest our time and resources, so that there is a greater return in lives changed by the power of the Gospel. Amen.

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