

The reality of Hell: Physical and spiritual

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Since the question about hell arises from the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, it is imperative that some explanation be given about Hell, both at the present time, and in the future. However, in discussing the issue of Hell, please understand that this discussion will be limited to the explanation of the spiritual and physical aspects and time line of Hell. This is due to the fact that the doctrine of Hell is quite extensive and many passages of Scripture address Hell, and how Hell came to be and who will go there. This article simply does not have the room to extensively address the issue without detracting from its main focus. With that understood, let us look at the physical and spiritual aspects of hell, and the time line for each.

There are some that cannot seem to understand that hell at the present time is strictly spiritual. The evidence for this is quite conclusive from the Scripture. Even in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, it is quite plain that hell must be spiritual as the rich man's body was assuredly decomposing in the ground. We should know this from both our experience, and from the Scriptures.

Early on in the Scriptures we are given the definition of physical death when Rachel died immediately after giving birth to Benjamin.

And they journeyed from Bethel; and there was but a little way to come to Ephrath: and Rachel travailed, and she had hard

labour. And it came to pass, when she was in hard labour, that the midwife said unto her, Fear not; thou shalt have this son also. And it came to pass, as her soul was in departing, (for she died) that she called his name Benoni: but his father called him Benjamin. And Rachel died, and was buried in the way to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem. (*Genesis 35:16-19*)

Notice in the above passage the statement in the parenthesis "for she died" which is used to explain the statement "as her soul was in departing," By this short passage the Scripture explains that physical death consists of the soul's departure from the body. This is key to understanding the doctrines of death, hell, heaven, and the resurrection. If we cannot understand that there is a great distinction between the physical and the spiritual, and that it is the spiritual that animates the physical, then we will never understand the Lord's teaching concerning anything about salvation or the afterlife. After all, the Lord Jesus did expressly state to Nicodemus: That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. (*John 3:6*) This clear distinction makes the physical and the spiritual mutually exclusive. In other words, what affects one, will not necessarily affect the other. The Lord Jesus also made this plain in Matthew, chapter 10:

And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. (*Matthew 10:28*)

In other words, when the body is injured or killed, that has no effect upon the soul. The soul cannot be injured or killed by physical means. The soul, for it to be injured or killed, must be afflicted by spiritual means. Moreover, the destiny of the soul is not set by physical action. Rather, it is the spiritual rebellion against God and His law that kill the soul.

With that understood, there is one other event in Scripture

that sheds light on the fact that at this present time Hell is strictly spiritual. In the Gospel of John it is recorded for us the event of raising a different Lazarus from the dead. This event is important because the Lord deliberately waited for Lazarus to die, and remain dead for four days before He raised him. The comments of those around the Lord plainly demonstrate where the body of Lazarus was during the time he was dead.

These things said he: and after that he saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep.

Then said his disciples, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well. Howbeit Jesus spake of his death: but they thought that he had spoken of taking of rest in sleep.

Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead.

And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe; nevertheless let us go unto him.

Then said Thomas, which is called Didymus, unto his fellow disciples, Let us also go, that we may die with him.

Then when Jesus came, he found that he had *lain* in the grave four days already.

Now Bethany was nigh unto Jerusalem, about fifteen furlongs off: And many of the Jews came to Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother.

Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met him: but Mary sat *still* in the house.

Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.

But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give *it* thee.

Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again.

Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.

Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.

Believest thou this?

She saith unto him, Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.

And when she had so said, she went her way, and called Mary her sister secretly, saying, The Master is come, and calleth for thee.

As soon as she heard *that*, she arose quickly, and came unto him.

Now Jesus was not yet come into the town, but was in that place where Martha met him.

The Jews then which were with her in the house, and comforted her, when they saw Mary, that she rose up hastily and went out, followed her, saying, She goeth unto the grave to weep there.

Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying unto him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.

When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled, And said, Where have ye laid him? They said unto him, Lord, come and see.

Jesus wept.

Then said the Jews, Behold how he loved him!

And some of them said, Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?

Jesus therefore again groaning in himself cometh to the grave. It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it.

Jesus said, Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been *dead* four days.

Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?

Then they took away the stone *from the place* where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up *his* eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me.

And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the

people which stand by I said *it*, that they may believe that thou hast sent me.

And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth.

And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go. (*John 11:11-44*)

By the above passage, it is extremely clear that the body of Lazarus (the physical part of Lazarus) was in the grave – and nowhere else. Whatever error the people around the Lord Jesus Christ had, they correctly understood that Lazarus' body was lying in the grave. The Lord Jesus Christ plainly acknowledged this fact, but groaned within Himself because of their lack of faith and lack of understanding that He had power over life and death. Plainly, all the people present, including the Apostles, did not truly understand that the Lord Jesus was indeed Almighty God in the flesh. Nonetheless, when the Lord Jesus Christ raised Lazarus from the dead, he did not call Lazarus' body from anywhere but the cave in which Lazarus was placed. Now, it must be understood that Lazarus' soul was called back from heaven to return into his body, but Lazarus' body never went anywhere.

Thus, we see in the present time that hell is strictly spiritual. It is plain from all evidence that the physical body stays here on earth, when the soul departs the body to go to either heaven or hell.

However, this is not to say that they will remain that way forever. Indeed, the Scripture is quite express in stating that there will be a new heavens and new earth. In like manner, there will be a 'new' hell – the Lake of Fire.

Prior to the new heavens and new earth and the Lake of Fire, there will be resurrections, first of those in Christ, and then those who rejected the gospel.

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.

But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This *is* the first resurrection. 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. (*Revelation 20:4-6*)

And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them.

And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is *the book* of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. 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.

And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire. (*Revelation 20:11-15*)

Throughout the Scripture, the resurrection is spoken of. In relating the events of the resurrection, one of the predominant thoughts is that all who are resurrected will go physically to either heaven, or the Lake of Fire. In the passage about the raising of Lazarus from the dead, the Lord Jesus referred to physical death as "sleeping." To the LORD God, physical death is simply the body sleeping in the earth. In the Scripture, only spiritual death is referred to as being

actually dead (or the true death). In Daniel, one of the last things the Holy Ghost had Daniel record was a witness of the coming resurrection

And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation *even* to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book. And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. (*Daniel 12:1-2*)

By this description, we know that Daniel speaks of a physical resurrection. We also find that the Lord Jesus Christ spoke of the resurrection as well. However, in the following passage, the Lord first speaks of someone being born-again, and then speaks of His power to call the body out of the grave.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live.

For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man.

Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, 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. (*John 5:24-29*)

It should be now understood that, if the soul departing the body causes the body to die, then at the resurrection, the Lord will command the soul back into the body. In the case of

those written in the book (or in Christ), the resurrection will mean having a new body like unto Christ's resurrected body. In the case of those who never obeyed the gospel, their souls will be called out of hell and be reunited with their bodies for the purpose of standing before the Lord Jesus Christ to be judged.

Though the dead (those who never obeyed the gospel and trusted the Lord Jesus Christ for their salvation) will stand before the Lord for judgment, it is not a judgment to determine their destiny. Rather, it is a judgment to prove to them that their condemnation is indeed just. They will be shown that they knew that God was real and that they knew instinctively that they had transgressed His commandments. Moreover, they will be shown that they rejected obeying the will of God. Instead, they choose to depend upon themselves for their wisdom and the determination of their destiny. In the end, every one of them will certainly know that they are justly condemned. However, bowing the knee at that time and confessing the Jesus Christ is Lord, will not avail them at all. The time for making that choice is long past as Hebrews, chapter 9 states:

And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: (*Hebrews 9:27*)

Thus, at the end of each and every individual judgment of the lost, that person will be cast into the Lake of Fire for their soul and body to be tormented forever. This is what the Lord Jesus Christ was referring to when he spoke to those around Him in Matthew, chapter 10:

And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. (*Matthew 10:28*)

By the above scriptural evidence, it should now be clear that Hell will be both physical and spiritual at the last judgment. However, currently Hell is spiritual only. And, although it is

currently spiritual and not physical, make no mistake: Spiritual torment is by far a worse torment than the strictly physical. After all, there are many testimonies of martyrs being cruelly tortured and expressing no indication of suffering at all. However, the anguish of the soul is inescapable and we have no means of relieving it. That prerogative belongs to the LORD God and Him alone.

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