

# Five Seconds After You Die

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## INTRODUCTION

- A. It is not uncommon for people who know they are about to die to think about life after death.
1. Perhaps they're like the woman who had a terminal illness and asked an artist to paint her portrait to give to her husband.
    - a. The artist immediately began his assignment but at the first sitting, the woman asked if he could paint a gorgeous diamond and sapphire necklace around her neck. He said of course, but he asked her to bring in the necklace next time so he could see what he was painting.
    - b. She announced that she couldn't do that. She didn't own such a necklace.
      - 1) The artist asked why she wanted the picture then.
      - 2) The woman replied, "My husband has his eye on a neighbor lady down the street. And after I die and they get together, I want her to spend the rest of her life looking for that necklace."
  2. Personally, I cannot enter the funeral home without contemplating what the person lying in the casket is experiencing.
    - a. What is it really like to be dead?
    - b. We don't have all the answers to that question, but there are several answers in Scripture. And this morning, we want to examine those answers we have in Scripture.
- B. Up until now, death has been the common lot of man.
1. We understand, I pray, death's universality.
    - a. "When David's time to die drew near, he commanded Solomon his son, saying, 'I am about to go the way of all the earth'" (1 Ki 2:1-2).
    - b. "Sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned" (Rm 5:12).
  2. Yet, I cannot say that death is completely universal, for Jesus could return before any of us here experience death.
    - a. "Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed in a moment in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet" (1 Cor 15:51-52).
    - b. 1 Thess 4:14-17.
  3. However, whether our flesh dies or the Lord comes first, we are leaving this world.
    - a. Five seconds after that departure, things will be vastly different from what they are now.
    - b. This morning, we want to think about "FIVE SECONDS AFTER YOU DIE." We will classify these events into three categories: THE COMMON, THE CHEERFUL, & THE CURSED.

## THE COMMON

- A. Judgment is the common lot of man after death.
1. "It is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment" (Heb 9:27).
  2. We understand that it is appointed for man to face judgment after death, for our God is a judging God.
    - a. "We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things" (Rm 2:2).
    - b. "Each of us will give an account of himself to God" (Rm 14:12).
  3. We likewise understand there is a judgment when Jesus comes to destroy this world.
    - a. "The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead" (Acts 17:30-31).
    - b. "I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books; according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it. Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done" (Rv 20:12-13).
- B. It seems to me that there is some sort of judgment immediately after death.
1. It may or may not be that people stand before God to give an account upon their death.
  2. It is my opinion however, that some sort of judgment takes place immediately after death.

- a. Abraham told the rich man, “Between us (in Paradise) and you (in torment) a great chasm has been fixed in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us” (Lk 16:26).
- b. If that is not judgment please tell me what is!
- 3. What would be the purpose of these two judgments?
  - a. The Scriptures do not tell us; and I’m left with my own reasoning and opinions.
  - b. The best illustration of what I think is going on would be our modern judicial system.
    - 1) At the conclusion of a trial, a defendant stands and a verdict is read—that is judgment.
    - 2) Sometime later, the defendant comes back before the judge to receive a sentence—that is also judgment.
      - a) The judgment after death certainly seems to be a verdict—there is no doubt as to whether or not you know whether you’re condemned or not five seconds after death.
      - b) The judgment after the world seems to be a passing of sentence. Notice, for example, what Jesus says at the judgment: “Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Mt 25:41).
- C. It is said a Hungarian king, finding himself on a certain day depressed and unhappy, sent for his brother, a good-natured, but rather indifferent prince.
  - 1. To him, the king said: “I am a great sinner and fear to meet God.”
    - a. But the prince only laughed at him, and treated the matter as a joke, just as so many do.
    - b. This did not serve to relieve the royal unhappiness.
  - 2. It was a custom in Hungary at that time, that if the executioner at any time sounded a trumpet before a man’s door, it was a signal that he would be led forth to execution.
  - 3. The king sent the executioner in the dead of night to sound the fatal blast before his brother’s door.
    - a. The prince, awaking from sleep, realized its awful import. Quickly dressing, he stepped to the door and was seized by the executioner; and dragged pale and trembling, into the king’s presence.
    - b. In agony and terror, he fell upon his knees before his brother and begged to know in what way he had offended him. “My brother;” answered the king, “If the sight of a human executioner is so terrible to you, shall not I having grievously offended God, fear to be brought before the judgment seat of Christ?”
- D. We shall stand before the judgment seat of Christ. Are you ready to stand before the judgment seat of Christ?

## **THE CHEERFUL**

- A. If we die in Christ, death will be the best thing to ever happen to us!
  - 1. We don’t think of death as wonderful and cheerful and glorious—to us death has a sting, death hurts, and we do everything in our power to avoid death.
  - 2. Yet, if we die in Christ, I have no doubt whatsoever that five seconds later, we’ll be grateful to be dead! Why would our death be cheerful?
- B. Five seconds after death, we shall meet the angels.
  - 1. Jesus said about Lazarus’ death: “The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s side” (Lk 16:22).
    - a. There has been much ink spilled over whether or not the rich man and Lazarus was a true story or a parable.
    - b. Those debates are irrelevant and totally miss the point for the parables of Jesus always contained what was true to life.
      - 1) Look at Jesus’ parables—the Parable of the Sower, the Parable of the Good Samaritan.
      - 2) They are not at all like Aesop’s fables, which make good points but are fanciful.
  - 2. The first being we shall meet after death will be angels—whether it be in the hospital room, in our car, on a battlefield or wherever.
  - 3. This demonstrates God’s care.
    - a. God will not leave our disembodied spirits hopelessly trapped on this earth.
    - b. But, he will care for our spirits and send his special servants, the angels, to carry us home.
- C. Five seconds after death, we shall meet Jesus.
  - 1. We know that those in Christ are with the Lord even prior to the final resurrection.
    - a. Struggling with his desire to remain alive and work for the cause of Christ or to leave this world and lay aside those struggles, Paul writes, “I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and

- be with Christ for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account” (Phil 1:23-24).
- b. “We are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord” (2 Cor 5:8).
2. What a blessed thought to know that as we open our eyes in glory, the hand which will reach out to greet us will be the the hand that was nailed to the cross in order that we could be there!
- D. Five seconds after death, we meet the saints of all the ages.
1. There has been that debate for many years as to whether or not we shall know one another in heaven.
  2. I would never be so presumptuous as to claim that I have all the answers, yet the Scriptures clearly indicate that we will know one another in heaven.
    - a. To the penitent thief on the cross, Jesus said, “Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise” (Lk 23:43). There is not recognition in heaven, why would Jesus say, “You will be with me in Paradise”?
    - b. The fact that the rich man was able to recognize both Lazarus and Abraham strongly implies that disembodied spirits can distinguish one another in the Hadean realm.
    - c. When the child born to David and Bathsheba died, David said “I shall go to him, but he will not return to me” (2 Sam 12:23).
  3. Can you really imagine what it’s going to be like in heaven to meet the saints from all the ages?
    - a. We know we shall meet Abraham, for Lazarus was with him.
    - b. At the final resurrection, there will be a great reunion of all the faithful who have ever lived: “The Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left; will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and so we will always be with the Lord” (1 Thess 4:16-17).
- E. Five seconds after death, we shall have comfort untold.
1. There is absolutely no reason for us to fear death.
    - a. Jesus came to “deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery” (Heb 2:15).
      - 1) In fact, I’d argue that there’s a sense in which we ought to desire death.
      - 2) Paul desired to die: “My DESIRE is to depart and be with Christ” (Phil 1:23).
    - b. However it is a reality of life that the process of dying is anything but desirable. Typically, there is untold agony before death—pain often becomes almost unbearable even with the best painkillers available.
  2. However, five seconds after death, all that pain, suffering, temptation, and all the other junk we deal with in this life shall forever end!
    - a. To the rich man, Abraham said that in this life “Lazarus [received] bad things; but now he is comforted here” (Lk 16:25).
    - b. About the new heavens and earth, John records, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away” (Rv 21:3-4).
- F. A widely respected man known as “Uncle Johnson” died in Michigan at the incredible age of 120.
1. Perhaps the reason he lived so long was his cheerful outlook on life.
    - a. One day while working in his garden, he was singing songs of praise to God.
    - b. Another member of the congregation was walking by and said “Uncle Johnson, you seem very happy today.”
  2. “Yes, I was just thinking,” said the old man.
    - a. “Thinking about what?”
    - b. “Oh, I was just thinking that if the crumbs of joy that fall from the Master’s table in this world are so good, what will the great loaf in glory be like! I tell you, sin there will be enough for everyone and some to spare up there.”

## THE CURSED

- A. All shall not be cheerful five seconds after they die, but some shall be ever so cursed.
- B. Five seconds after death, the cursed shall experience torment.

1. Do you recall the interaction between the rich man & Abraham? The rich man “called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.’ But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here and you are in anguish’ ” (Lk 16:24-25).
  2. Jesus says:
    - a. “In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Mt 8:12).
    - b. Jesus refers to torment as a place “where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched” (Mk 9:48).
  3. No bliss, no comfort, no tears wiped away—instead untold agony and suffering.
- C. Five seconds after death, the cursed shall realize there is no hope.
1. When the rich man asked for a drop of water, Abraham replied, “Between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us” (Lk 16:26).
  2. Concerning those who worship the beast and his image, John records, “The smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night” (Rv 14:11)—Torment forever and ever without any hope of reprieve.
  3. It is reported that Sir Francis Newport, a well-known infidel in 17th century England said on his deathbed, “You need not tell me there is no hell, for I already feel my soul slipping into its fires! Wretches, cease your idol talk about there being hope for me! I know I am lost forever.” That is the epitome of hopelessness!
- D. Five seconds after death, the cursed shall worry for their families.
1. The rich man did; he said to Abraham, “I beg you, father, to send (Lazarus) to my father’s house—for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment” (Lk 16:27-28).
  2. Can you imagine a worse agony than knowing you were in hell and that your family was following you there?
- E. Five seconds after death, the cursed shall opine for a second chance.
1. We know that the cursed have recollections of their earthly life after death: Abraham said to the rich man, “Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things” (Lk 16:25).
  2. The rich man had full cognition of the life he had before he left this world.
  3. Can you imagine his thoughts? “If only I had cared for Lazarus”; “If only I had obeyed the Law!”; “If only my priorities were in order!”
  4. What things might you regret if you end up in hell? “If only I had responded to that invitation hymn”; “If only I had put God first!”; “I only I . . . I”
- F. In his *Inferno*, Dante wrote these words on the gates of hell: “I am the way into the city of woe. I am the way to a forsaken people. I am the way to eternal sorrow. Sacred justice moved my architect. I was raised here by divine omnipotence, Primordial love and ultimate intelligence. Only these elements times cannot wear were made before me, and beyond time I stand. Abandon all hope ye who enter here.”
- G. Will you see the gates of heaven or the gates of hell? Do you need to come this morning and claim the free gift of God in Christ Jesus?