

Life After Death

What will life after death be like? Of course we mean life after the death we go through on earth. We are not talking this evening about the eternal death, the second death, only the death that is inevitable, along with taxes. It seems as if in this day and age we are trying to cheat death more and more and so life forever.

Also we are talking about the life in heaven this evening. That is what is meant by the title Life After Death. However this evening we are NOT talking about heaven per se, with such questions as:

- What is heaven like?
- The architecture of heaven
- What will be happening when we get to heaven?

Those are questions for another evening. This evening we are talking about

- Lifestyle
- What sort of body we will have?

We read in the life of Jesus that one day he was approached by some Sadducees,

“...who said that there is no resurrection,...with a question. "Teacher," they said, "Moses told us that if a man dies without having children, his brother must marry the widow and have children for him. Now there were seven brothers among us. The first one married and died, and since he had no children, he left his wife to his brother. The same thing happened to the second and third brother, right on down to the seventh. Finally, the woman died. Now then, at the resurrection, whose wife will she be of the seven, since all of them were married to her?"”
(Matthew 22:23-28 NIV)

So there is this question posed to Jesus. Whose wife is she, even though she seems to have been a cursed to them all, having seen out seven brothers! We read

“Jesus replied, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. But about the resurrection of the dead—have you not read what God said to you, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not the God of the dead but of the living." When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at his teaching.”
(Matthew 22:29-33 NIV)

So when we are in heaven we will not be married. Having been married to the same person for fifty years on earth, you are no longer married to them when in heaven because there is no marriage. For some it is sounding better all the time! So what will the relationships be? With no marriage, this leads on to some other questions:

1. Will we have friends in heaven?
2. Will we recognise each other?

To answer the first question is influenced partially by the second. To have friend we have to recognise someone. You only know if someone is a friend, acquaintance or enemy if you can see them and recognise them. If there are no husbands and wives in heaven, then there may be no friends, so no need to recognise anyone.

However Jesus told a parable that went like this:

“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.’”

(Luke 16:19-24 NIV)

The rich man recognised Abraham and Lazarus and he says, **‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus.’** But then how did he recognise Abraham? No photos to remember and Abraham had lived a few centuries before either the rich man or Lazarus. Maybe, as it is a parable we are not to take the detail too seriously. Take care not to have theology based solely on parables – they may lead you astray.

So will we recognise each other in heaven? But what about people whom I knew when I was ten and then lost contact with because we moved? If they are in heaven, will I recognise them and they me. And is that recognition as a ten year old or as the age at which I die? And if I am with several people, one who knew me at aged ten and another aged thirty, yet a third just before I died, how would I appear to them? Would I appear to each of them the age they knew me or one age but eh instantly knew me? Or is it that we do not recognise each other at all in heaven so it does not matter? Questions to which sadly there are no real answers. The real answer is that we will have to wait until we get there to find out, but then we might not have the same thoughts as we do now – who knows except God.

So do we need a body? Not really but we have read

“So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.”

(1 Corinthians 15:42-44 NIV)

There is a resurrection body. I am putting in for the Adonis model – similar to what I already have!! But what does it look like?

Every year all the ministers of the LBA gather at what is called a consultation lasting from Monday lunch to Wednesday lunch. Most Association do the same thing. At the very first one I went to after coming to ADBC, Pat Took, our Team Leader Regional Minister stated that according to the Greeks, in heaven the body would be spheroid in shape because the sphere was considered to be the perfect shape. It is the shape which has the largest volume for the smallest surface area. She then looked up, and meaningfully looked around the room and said, ‘I see that some of you are getting the perfect shape already!’

But we are not the shape of the body but we are told that

- It will be different from the earthly body – just as seed is different to the plant it produces (15:37-42)
- It will not perish – i.e. unlike this one it will not wear out. The new body will last forever. (15:42)

- We will be in a place of glory – why else would we need a glorious body? (15:43). What this glorious body actually looks like in appearance I do not know. Maybe it will look like an angel’s body, but my reading of the Bible is that angels often look like human beings. We can be in danger of projecting our concepts onto other things. Take for example a programme like Star Trek. Whenever it meets another alien species they tend to be humanoid if they are advanced. This is because we think that humanoid is best. If we scrap the idea that humanoid is best then we could be any shape but we have to balance that with the verse that says

“So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” (Genesis 1:27 NLT)

So it may be that humanoid is the best shape because we are created in the image of God. Does this mean in his physical likeness or in his personality likeness. I tend to go for both. However we have to remember the first point that the spiritual body will be as different to our earthly body as a seed is from a plant. This however may be in what it does, not necessarily how it looks.

- It will be a powerful body – not a body that has weaknesses (15:43). So a body with no aches or pains, but I am sure that there will still be limitations on our new bodies.

So again we cannot make any hard and fast rules as to Life After Death, but we do know that when it happen it will be sudden as the last part of 1 Corinthians 15 said. Verse 50

“I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.”

“Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.” (1 Corinthians 15:50-58 NIV)

PRAYER