

TITLE: "Life after Life"

TEXT: Luke 16:19-31 (NT pp. 79-80) to be read during the sermon

Introduction – Some day it will be you

Another anecdote from the *Burt and I* series...

We were clammin' along the beach one Sunday when we come across a body in the kelp. We didn't recognize the face, but thought it might be old John who tended the lighthouse out on the point. We went directly out there and knocked on John's door. "John, you there?"

"Darn right I am. What can I do for ya?"

"We found a body in the kelp and thought it might be you."

"Wearin' a red shirt?"

"Yes, sir, red shirt."

"Blue trousers?"

"They was blue trousers."

"Rubber boots?"

"Ayup, they was rubber boots."

"Was they high boots or low?"

"...They was low boots."

"You sure?"

"Well, come ta think of it, they was high boots, turned down low."

"Oh, well then,twern't me."

You may not wind up in the kelp, but someday it WILL be you ...and me. So this morning I want to preach on what happens after we die.

1. Life after life

I have done hundreds of funerals over the years and yet I still get a dizzy feeling when I look at someone I knew and cared for lying in an open casket. I mean, there the person is, but even though it looks like the person, the vitality of life is so obviously missing. T

So what actually happens when we die? The Bible is very clear about the fact that our soul, or spirit, continues on and lives forever. So what is it LIKE to be a soul without a body? I don't have a great imagination regarding such things, so it has helped me to hear from people who actually have died.

In his book *Life after Life*, Dr. Raymond Moody recorded interviews he had with about 175 people who died and then were resuscitated. I do NOT consider these accounts to be infallible truth, but they DO help me to understand what it may be like when we die and are a soul without a body. And it is ALSO interesting to see the striking parallels between these experiences and some biblical texts.

Here is one person's experience:

I knew I was dying and there was nothing I could do about it, because no one could hear me....I was out of my body, there's no doubt about it, because I could see my own body there on the operating table. My soul was out! All this made me feel very bad at first, but then, this really bright light came. It did seem like it was a little dim at first, but then it was this huge beam. It was just a tremendous amount of light, it was just too much light. And it gave off heat to me; I felt a warm sensation.

It was a bright yellowish white—more white. It was tremendously bright; I just can't describe it. It seemed that it covered everything, yet it didn't prevent me from seeing everything around me—the operating room, the doctors and nurses, everything. I could see clearly, and it wasn't blinding.

At first, when the light came, I wasn't sure what was happening, but then, it asked, it kind of asked me if I was ready to die. It was like talking to a person, but a person wasn't there. The light's what was talking to me, but in a *voice*.

Now, I think that the voice that was talking to me actually realized that I wasn't ready to die. You know, it was just kind of testing me more than anything else. Yet, from the moment the light spoke to me, I felt really good—secure and loved. The love which came from it is just unimaginable, indescribable. It was a fun person to be with! And it had a sense of humor, too—definitely!

Contrast this experience with the experience of John when he was caught up to heaven and beheld Jesus:

¹²Then I turned to see whose voice it was that spoke to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lamp stands, ¹³and in the midst of the lamp stands I saw one like the Son of Man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash across his chest. ¹⁴His head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, ¹⁵his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters. ¹⁶In his right hand he held seven stars, and from his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining with full force (Revelation 1:12-16).

Many of those who have had near death experiences met this “Being of Light” and many recognized the Being as Jesus.

2. Confusion after life

In another of his books, titled *Reflections on Life after Life*, Dr. Ray Moody asks a person who had been “dead” for about 15 minutes and later been resuscitated (p.19ff) About the “place of confusion” that she had mentioned:

[When you were “dead”] you mentioned seeing some people—spirits who seemed very confused. Could you tell me more about them?

...as I was going by, there was this area that was dull—this is in contrast to the brilliant light. The figures were more humanized than the rest of them were, ...but neither were they in quite human form as we are. ...What you would think of as their head was bent downward; they had sad, depressed looks; they seemed to shuffle, as someone would on a chain gang. I don't know why I say this because I don't remember noticing feet. I don't know what they were, but they looked washed out, dull, gray.

And they seemed to be forever shuffling and moving around, not knowing where they were going, not knowing who to follow, or what to look for. ...They would start straight, then veer to the left and take a few steps and veer back to the right.

As I went by, they didn't even raise their heads to see what was happening. They seemed to be thinking, "Well, it's all over with. What am I doing? What's it all about?" Just this absolute crushed, hopeless demeanor—not knowing what to do or where to go or who they were or anything else.

Here Dr. Moody asks a person who saw a woman in the place of confusion trying to reach through to children and an older woman in a house in our world:

Was there any particular thing she was trying to tell them?

Well, it seems more or less that she was trying to get through to them, trying to tell them, seemingly, to do things differently from what they were doing now, to change, to make a change in their lifestyle. Now, this sounds kind of put on, but she was trying to get them to do the right things, to change so as not to be left like she was. "Don't do as I did, so this won't happen to you. Do things for others so you won't be left like this."

I'm not trying to moralize or make a sermon, but this seemed to be the message that she was trying to get across.... It seemed that in this house there was no love, if you want to put it that way....It seemed that she was trying to atone for something she had done....It's an experience I'll never forget.

This reminds me of our parable for this morning, where Jesus says:

¹⁹“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. ²⁰And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, ²¹who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. ²²The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried.

²³In Hades, where [the rich man] was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. ²⁴He called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames.'

²⁵But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. ²⁶Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.’

²⁷He said, ‘Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father’s house— ²⁸for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.’ ²⁹Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.’ ³⁰He said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ ³¹He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead’” (Luke 16:19-31)

Is the “place of confusion” hell? I don’t know. But I do know that there will be people, like that rich man, who will separated from God forever.

3. Resurrection

The Bible is very clear about this. God’s Word says that two things will happen after we die. When the Lord comes again, there WILL be a resurrection from the dead and there will be a final judgment. At the Final Judgment the Lord will decide whether a resurrected person will live WITH God or AWAY from God forever. I don’t have time to get into the judgment this morning, but I do want to mention the resurrection.

At the resurrection, we will be given new spiritual bodies that will never grow old, never get sick, never wear out and never die. What will this new spiritual body be like? We have a description from the Bible. Since Jesus was sinless, he was resurrected soon after he died on the cross and this is what the disciples saw (Luke 24:36-43):

³⁶While [the disciples] were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” ³⁷They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. ³⁸He said to them, “Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? ³⁹Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” ⁴⁰And when [Jesus] had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.

⁴¹While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, [Jesus] said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” ⁴²They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³and he took it and ate in their presence.

In John, we also read: “A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you’” (John 20:26).

- When we are resurrected, we will be recognizable as the person we were on earth.
- We WILL have flesh, of a sort, because we will be able to eat and enjoy food.
- We will be able to communicate with others.
- We will even be able to pass right through solid walls!
- And all the scars of our life, all the things that hurt us most, will not only be healed ...they will be glorified and made part of the joy we will experience.

Conclusion – Why is this important?

Why is all this important? Because the decisions you make today are going to effect where you will be and what you will be doing 100, 1,000, a million and a billion years from today. And the MOST important decision you can make is to have faith in Jesus Christ and to follow Jesus for the rest of your life here on earth. If you do, you will experience love, joy and peace in your life after life and your love, joy and peace will last forever and ever and ever.

Amen.