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Presentation Transcript
Life After Death, Part 1 – Our One True Hope
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Do you know what will happen to you after you die? Many people in our culture now believe nothing will happen to them. They believe they have no life past this life. They believe that they will breathe their last breath, and their heart will stop pumping life-giving blood to their brains, and they will become unconscious and die shortly thereafter. That's it. Life is over.

Others are not so sure. I've heard people say thing like, "No one has ever come back to tell us if there's anything beyond death, so I can't say for sure." Other people believe to various levels of certainty that they have an immortal soul, which leaves their mortal body when it dies. Most of them believe that, if they're "good," they'll go to heaven, and if they were "bad" their souls will go to hell or one of the stop-offs, like purgatory – all them, of course, places of suffering for past sins.

Most of these folks believe that these concepts have their source in the Bible, and yet, they *do not!* You can read the Bible from cover to cover and you will not find any mention of an immortal soul, nor a heavenly abode for us, nor a place of eternal burning. Don't take my word for it. The Bible is about what's going to happen to you after you die. So read it for yourself to find out.

The idea of an immortal soul is an ancient Greek concept that got melded with Christian thought hundreds of years after Christ lived and died. If that's true – if we have no immortal soul – then it would be impossible to go to heaven, because heaven is outside the physical universe, where no physical person could live. And the same thing with the fires of hell. Fire is a physical chemical reaction, not something that can burn for eternity. Talking like a fool now, what fuel would you use that would last that long? How big would the source have to be? Then again, how could fire – a physical reaction – hurt an immortal soul, which could not possibly be physical, and therefore, unaffected at all by fire?

Now, faced with these absurdities, some people try to reason that God can do anything. He's going to suspend all the rules of nature He made to force people to burn in hell, for example.

Well, we wouldn't argue that God can do anything, but we would have to say in response, "Show us in the Bible what He says He's going to do." And that's probably a pretty good place to start talking about what happens to us when we die – with the Bible!

I started this presentation with the idea that this would be, what I call, a stand-alone presentation, but the more I thought about it, it seems that the Bible has so much to say about what happens after we die, this will just have to be the first part of a series. Given all the confusion and the lack of belief in the world, would it be surprising to you that there is so much about this topic in the Bible – that it would take more than one presentation to cover it all. So we're going to call this series *Life After Death*, and we're calling the first part of this series *Our One True Hope*.

So let's start with a scripture – one which really fits in with what I was just saying – 1 Thessalonians 4:13. The apostle Paul is writing this to a congregation that he visited. He said:

1 Thessalonians 4:13 – *But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others who have no hope.*

I don't think anybody wants to be ignorant or ill-informed. And this verse sheds the divine light of God on what God wants for us. He does not want us to be confused or uncertain or ignorant about what's going to happen after they die. He doesn't want anyone to feel hopeless for themselves, or for loved ones who have passed on. If you feel any of those ways, right here, God has something for you. Right here, if you'll listen.

I keep going back to the documentary I saw about the making of the movie *Ray*. It was about Ray Charles – the famous singer. Ray himself – the real Ray – was the consultant in the film. I thought that was a pretty good idea to have the guy the movie is about as a consultant. You wonder, when you see these biographical movies, how true they are. Well, in this scene of the documentary, Jamie Fox, who played Ray Charles, was trying to play one of Ray's songs. And he's a good pianist. And he kept trying and trying to play this song, but it just didn't sound quite right to him. And finally, he threw up his hands and exclaimed, "I just can't get it!" And Ray Charles, who was looking at Jamie Fox from the other side of the piano – they were close, face-to-face – explained, "Yes, yes you can! It's right there – right there under your fingers!"

Well, this is a bit like that. If you really want to know what will happen to you, or any loved ones who have passed out of this life, it's right there! It's right there, when you go to the Bible, under your gaze. No one needs to guess, or be in the dark, or feel hopeless about their future, or their destiny, or how God is going to take them there. It's right there. So let's keep reading in 1 Thessalonians 4:14, which is the next verse, he said:

V-14 – *For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again – you believe that, don't you? Well, if you're a Christian, you should. That's what being a Christian is about. ...even so – or just in the same way – through Jesus, God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep.*

Here's what this is saying: Just as Jesus died and was resurrected from the dead three days later – He physically died and was physically resurrected three days later – just like that, God will resurrect all who have believed in Him to come with Him when He returns to the earth.

Now, besides dying for our sins, a major point of Jesus being resurrected was to show us what will happen to us after *we* die. But what's this business of Jesus bringing those who have died with Him when He returns? Well, file that one for now. We're going to get to that later. There's not going to be any need to guess about it. The Bible is going to make it perfectly clear.

But so far, getting back to where we were, in two verses, we've learned that when a person dies, it's like being asleep – that is, you're unconscious. That word in this section was used twice in two verses. So that should be a hint for us. Over and over again, when the subject of death is discussed, that word *asleep* is associated with it.

Now what one thing happens when we go to sleep? Well, we wake up. Right? That's how Jesus was when He was in the tomb – asleep – sleeping the sleep of death. Then He woke up. He was resurrected. That's what God is telling us here. We don't die and waft off to heaven. We go to sleep. Have you ever seen the letters RIP on a tombstone? I haven't seen that for a long time. I think they don't use that anymore. But it used to be found on them. Do you know what RIP stands for? It stands for Rest In Peace. Now why would that be the hope, if we believe we're going to go immediately to heaven? It doesn't make any sense, does it? That's why they've taken it off tombstones. People don't believe in a resurrection anymore. They believe in going to heaven. Christianity today is moving further away from the true hope of all Christians – the resurrection from the dead.

A few months ago, I watched a movie called *Greyhound*. Greyhound was the name of a destroyer. Tom Hanks, in the movie, was the captain of this Greyhound. And it was, at this particular time, tasked with escorting cargo ships to Europe during World War II. This was very dangerous, because German subs patrolled the sea lane, sinking as many of these ships as they could. Well, in the movie, in one encounter with a German sub, several sailors died and they held a funeral at sea. And the captain performed the ceremony out of a Navy manual. He committed them to the sea, and then after that, the resurrection of the dead. No inclusion of any thought about going to heaven. I think they did accurate research on that film and a hold of a manual they would have used then, and read the very words out of it. That was as recently as the late 1930s. It's not that way any longer.

I've had people ask me if I was comforted by the thought of rotting in the grave, when I've told them I believe in a resurrection. That's where we have to discuss the soul and the biblical meaning of the term. We're not going to do that today, but don't worry, we will get to it in this series. For the record, my body rotting in the grave is just dust to dust. I, however, will be preserved for the resurrection from the dead. And we're going to talk about how God is going to do that later.

So I recall a discussion I once had with Ron Dart about this issue that more accurately describes how I think and how he thought about going to sleep in death. He said the thought of the resurrection meant to him that, at last, he was going to get a good night's sleep! So it doesn't have to be a negative.

So, okay, let's read more. Let's go over to Acts now – 2:29. Peter is talking here, and he makes a comment very pertinent to our discussion.

Acts 2:29 – *Brothers* – he said – *may I say to you* – this is Peter's great sermon on the Day of Pentecost, where 3,000 people were cut to the heart by his words and were baptized that very day. *Brothers, may I say with confidence about the patriarch David, that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day.*

V-34 – *For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, "The Lord says to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand....'"*

So Luke records Peter telling us that David did *not* ascend into heaven – that his tomb is with us to this day. God promised David that, in His Kingdom, he would reign over the twelve tribes of Israel. He's not doing that yet. He's asleep. That's what it says.

Psalms 17:15 – *As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness. When I awake, I shall be satisfied with Your likeness.* He was going to become like God when he awoke *after* the resurrection. Remember, he's still in the grave to this day.

So David, who was promised a position in God's Kingdom, died and was buried, and remains so, and will remain so, until he is resurrected from the dead. And, before he died, he understood that he was not going to heaven after he died.

Let's continue where we were in 1 Thessalonians then.

1 Thessalonians 4:13 – *But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope* – like all the poor people who have lost children and believe they will never see them again.

I don't know if you come into contact with people like that, but I have. I've seen them in my counseling practice. I'm concerned for those folks. It's a very sad thing. It's kind of like Pat Boone said in the movie, *God's Not Dead 2*: "The problem with atheism is that it doesn't take away the pain. It just takes away the hope." I've seen people in that condition. And it is a very sad thing.

And then he continues:

V-14 – *For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.*

Some folks have tried to make a case of the statement that Jesus will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep. It sort of sounds like He's bringing them from heaven, doesn't it? I mean, if you believe in heaven. But He doesn't say that. People believe that's what it means because that's what they already believe. That's just another way to misunderstand the Bible. We need to look at what it says without superimposing our own biases. Let's continue to read just what it says. If you can believe it without your own biases blinding you, here's what the Bible says will happen in plain English – verse 15, 1 Thessalonians 4:

V-15-17 – *For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For 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 in Christ 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.... Now, being caught up in the clouds is a long way from heaven. That's just in our own atmosphere. Right? ...and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words.*

Just to make it clear, here's what happens. At the end time, just before Christ returns, there will be people, who believed in and followed God, who have died – all the patriarchs, all the members of the early church, all the apostles and all the Christians between now and then that have died, they're all going to be resurrected when Christ returns. We saw the *sound of a trumpet*. That's the seventh trumpet mentioned in Revelation 19, I believe. And we're going to look at that too. At this time, all those faithful dead will be resurrected, drawn up to Christ, who is on His way down to the earth when that happens. And then almost immediately after that, those Christians who are alive when He returns will be changed to immortal spirit beings, just as the long-dead were changed when they were resurrected. So these people that are resurrected in this resurrection are no longer physical.

You may be thinking of the doctrine of the rapture, or the movie about it with... I think it was Kurt Cameron. I can't remember the movie name. Or, maybe you're thinking about the bumper sticker that says – I haven't seen this for a long time, but it was out there for a while – that said, "In case of rapture, this car will be unmanned" – the idea that people are going to disappear and then nothing else is going to happen for quite some period of time, and everyone wonders where they went. Well, Jesus does say that some will be taken and some left, but He does *not* say that there will be a great long period of time between their disappearance and His return. When the resurrection occurs, He's on the way down to receive them and to fight for the earth in the last battle, which, in the book of Revelation, is called the Battle of Armageddon.

The dead in Christ and the alive in Christ, who are alive on the earth at the time of His return, will be resurrected and meet Him above the earth – we just read all of that. And we’re going to get to the rock-solid proof of that later in this series – even more of it – more detail.

So what about the people who did not believe in God however? What’s going to happen to them – the overwhelmingly vast majority of all people who have ever lived? We’re going to get to that in the Bible – how the Bible explains all of that, too. But would it be fair to punish those, who through no fault of their own, never had a chance to accept Christ? You know, the old story about the missionary that was on his way to visit a remote tribe in Africa, and his truck had a breakdown, and he never made it – are those folks going to go to hell? Well, if you’re a mainstream Christian, you have to believe that. Your church demands it. It’s part of their doctrinal structure.

Let’s say, as a mainstream Christian, you don’t really believe that they all go to hell, like your church teaches you. But where is your proof that they don’t go to hell? Is it just a feeling you have? What can you show me in the Bible that says otherwise? Well, in this case, it takes more than our own biases, and I think most people have a gut feeling that God isn’t like that. If you say what your church teaches is not correct, and you have another idea, where is the biblical proof of it? Why should anybody be interested in your own personal ideas about what God’s going to do? You know, we make plans and have our ideas, and God laughs. What we need is biblical evidence.

So, in this series, if you hang in with it, you will hear with your own ears, and see with your own eyes that rock-solid proof. And, if you want to know what God is doing, you have to get it from Him in His book.

Let’s notice something else that Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15 now – verse 12.

1 Corinthians 15:12 – *Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?* You know, the Sadducees didn’t believe in a resurrection. They were in control of the temple, by the way, at that time. So, can you answer that question? In Christianity, the whole religion hangs on the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. To be a Christian means that we believe He died and was resurrected three days later. And, if we believe that, then we have to believe there’s a resurrection of the dead for us. His resurrection was just a shadow of what’s coming for us in the future. That’s part of Christianity. The two – His resurrection and the resurrection of all the dead – are inexorably intertwined. That’s what we’re supposed to learn from Jesus’ resurrection – that we are all going to be resurrected, just like He was. And Paul then goes on to explain some powerful implications.

V-13 – *But if there is no resurrection from the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. See the connection. We can believe that we’re going to be resurrected because Christ died. But, if you don’t believe in the resurrection, then it’s not possible Christ was raised. They’re connected. And*

if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. It's worthless. We're even found to be misrepresenting God – we ministers, he says – because we testified about God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. They're both true or they're both false. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, and you are still in your sins. And those also, who have fallen asleep in Christ, have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. Because we are so gullible! That's what he's saying. He's saying It would be stupid to be a Christian if Jesus was not resurrected from the dead, because the whole religion hangs on it. And if He was resurrected, then we're going to be resurrected as well. Life after death, for us, hangs on that too. And Paul, who was taught personally by Jesus Christ, makes this strong connection between the resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of the dead in Christ. They go together. You can't have the resurrection of Christ and no resurrection of His followers. If you believe that, you have no hope. Paul says, "It's a pitiful place to be."

People don't go to heaven when they die, but to the grave, to wait for a resurrection. You can't have it both ways. It's either one way or the other, but not both. No need for a resurrection if an immortal soul slips off to God. Paul tells us over and over again, "It's not heaven. It's the resurrection. Here's more of what he said in 1 Corinthians 15:50:

1 Corinthians 15:50-55 – *I tell you this, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God – Oh, so you can't be physical and be in God's Kingdom – nor does perishable inherit imperishable. In other words, once something dies, it's dead – not eternal. Behold, I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of any eye, at the last trumpet. There it is – the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable. The mortal body must put on immortality. And when the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"*

Now, does that sound to you like he believed in going to heaven? No. Clearly not. I want you to notice something also Job said. Job lived a long time before Christ. And what did he believe? Job was a faithful follower of God, a good man, he believed God, he knew God's plan. And here's what he said. He asked the same question I asked you today.

Job 14:14-15 – *If a man dies, shall he live again? What do you say? Well, here's what Job said: All the days of my service I would wait till my renewal should come. You would call, and I would answer You. You would long for the work of Your hand.*

And notice in Job 19:25 – he said:

Job 19:25-27 – *I know that my Redeemer lives – so thousands of years before Christ – because this man read the scriptures – he knew there was a Redeemer coming – and at the last He will stand upon the earth. He knew He was coming back. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me!*

So he knew a Redeemer was coming. It would be at the end time. He was going to come back to the earth. And Job knew that he would be long dead before that happened, and yet he also knew he was going to be able to see God with his very own eyes. And that, of course, could only happen after he had been resurrected to life again. And he says that he was overwhelmed with the joy of the thought of it. Wait just a minute. Did you catch it? Paul said the resurrected will be spirit. Job said he was going to be resurrected in his flesh. So what's with that? Well, it's not an error. The Bible will explain itself, if we keep going. And, if you just can't wait till later, after we're done today, look up the term in – it's best to look it up in a Bible help, but you can use a Bible concordance, if you want – just look up the term *first resurrection* in your Bible app. Just look for that. You think, "What? First resurrection? You mean there's more than one?" Hey, enough said for now on that topic. We're going to get to it later.

So, recapping what we've seen so far:

- Clear scripture showing a resurrection to eternal life – not physical life – of all who have lived and died, and who have believed in Christ. This happens at the seventh trumpet, just as Christ returns to take back the earth.
- We also saw scriptures revealing that some Christians will be alive when He returns, and they will be changed instantly from mortal to immortal. And they will rise at the same time as the previously dead saints rise and meet Christ in the air in the clouds, as He comes from heaven down to the earth.

Okay, that's what we've got so far. But what about all the billions who died and never had a chance to accept Christ? What about Job saying that he was going to be resurrected in his flesh? Amazingly, if you listen to this next presentation, you're going to see for yourself a clear scripture showing that rather than them all in hell to burn eternally, He'll give them all a first chance to accept Him as their Savior.

Think of it. I remember that exact moment when I understood that truth. I had worried about my parents and my brother. It was like a great weight was lifted off of my shoulders. God *is* a loving God and He has a plan for everybody – even those who don't yet know or believe in Him, who have died.

I've spent a lot of time with people who are grieving the loss of loved ones. Most of them don't believe in God's plan. They were uncertain or rejecting of life after death. And that is a sad, sad thing. But what about the many scriptures that people use to question

spiritual truths on this topic? Some have called those *problem scriptures*, but they aren't really problem scriptures at all. They really only make things clear once you understand what they mean. Sometimes, it's hard to understand what the Bible means because we're going to through several languages. Jesus spoke in Aramaic, and He knew Hebrew. It was translated from there into Greek, and then into English. You've got to lose something sometimes in the translation, or it makes it obscure.

What about scriptures like Lazarus and the rich man? Or, scriptures that some people think refer to an immortal soul? Or, what about the scriptures that talk about hell? Or, what about near-death experiences and the light at the end of the tunnel? Or, what about seances with mediums, where people supposedly speak to the dead – who actually are alive in their immortal soul? Or, ghosts? Or, all those dead people who are supposedly wandering around? Don't fret. The Bible puts forth a comprehensive picture of all of that. And we're going to cover as much of it as I know. You know, there's always something new coming up in this area – and new speculations and new weird ideas. But we'll go with whatever we've got so far.

So be looking for the next one in this series. It's called *The First Resurrection*. And don't forget to check our Website, liferesource.org – lots of good stuff there. You might want to take a look at our many series on the holy days. Just search for holy days and you'll find it. Or, go to the link that says *Series* and you'll see it there. All of these sermons on the holy days explain God's plan in its various steps. Did you know that? The biblical holy day, which everybody thinks today are Jewish, are actually a shadow of things to come. They're a shadow of how God is going to save *you*, to be specific – His plan for you and how He's doing it, through time, with all the people of the earth.

So why doesn't the church observe the holy days like Jesus and the New Testament Church did? When you think of it – when you think about it that way – it makes absolutely no sense. So, we'll get into that, too, maybe.

I want to take time here, before we close, just to thank everybody that's been donating to us. We very much appreciate your contributions. It's allowed us to go forward. We're so happy that people are helped by what we're putting out and supporting us financially. We couldn't do it without you.

Until next time, this is Bill Jacobs for LifeResource Ministries, serving children, families and the Church of God.