

Life's Most Important Question

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[0 : 00] If you've noticed in the bulletin, the message title for today is Life's Most Important Question. And I realize it is quite a statement to even set forth the idea that there is a singular question that could be life's most important question.

Because no doubt there are many different opinions as to what life's most important question really is. For many who are Christians, perhaps the greatest question in their mind is, Do you have a personal relationship to God through Jesus Christ?

No doubt that is a very important question. Yet, there is another question, the answer to which makes the first question of lesser importance.

And that is the question, is there life after death? This is even the more burning and important question.

More so than having a relationship to Jesus Christ. One might ask, well, how could there possibly be any more important issue than having a relationship to Jesus Christ?

[1 : 19] And the answer is found in, if there is no life after death, then one's relationship to Christ simply doesn't matter.

In fact, if there is no life after death, what you think is a relationship to Jesus Christ isn't at all. It isn't anything.

And it has no real substance. If there is no life after death, not much of anything matters.

If there is no life after death, the maxim of the Epicurean makes more sense than any other philosophy that anyone could possibly espouse.

And that is, eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die. What truly matters, if there is no life after death?

[2 : 21] Nothing. A hedonistic lifestyle is your best bet. Just pull out all the stops. Live however you please.

Do whatever you please. Offend anybody you please. Get whatever it takes to make you happy, regardless of who you have to step on.

Because nothing else matters anyway. All that you experience in this life is all that anybody ever can or will experience.

Period. Period. Because after it's over, there's nothing. Just nothing. One thing is certain about the issue of life after death, and that is this.

Either there is or there isn't. The law of the excluded middle comes into play.

[3 : 24] There is no middle. Either life after death is real, or it is not. One cannot avoid the attractiveness of atheism if there is no life after death.

In fact, atheism is the only logical recourse if we do not live on after this life. In fact, logic and consistency requires one to adopt atheism if there is no life after death.

It's the only game in town that's left to us. And if there is life after death, of whatever sort it is, other questions arise.

One, what is this life after death like? And how does it differ from this present life? And where will this life after death take place?

Does it apply to all human beings? Does life after death mean different kinds or qualities of life for different people?

[4 : 41] And if there is life after death, will some miss out on it because of behavior or decisions made in this life? Does this life after death consist of punishment and reward?

And if so, on what basis? If there are different places where life after death will be experienced, what are these like? And who qualifies for each?

So, however, however the life after death question is answered, the consequences are dramatic and stunning.

But, only for those living now, and what do I mean? Well, for the present. If there is life after death, and you accept that as true, then it will or should dramatically impact your present life in a stunning and striking manner.

If you believe there is life after death, it should impact and determine the way you live your life now. Your norms and standards, your priorities and goals, your very attitude of being on a day-to-day basis.

[6 : 05] In fact, if you believe there is life after death, it should make you a radically different person from what you would be if you were to believe there is no life after death.

The same is true if you believe there is no life after death. We are back to the hedonistic and Epicurean eat, drink, and be merry philosophy.

And this is what is meant by the implications and consequences of your belief about life after death being dramatic and stunning.

The consequences of life after death are likewise stunning after death, but only for the one who believed in it.

Only those who believe in life after death will it be stunning. Because upon your physical death, you will be automatically swept into the afterlife consisting of whatever it is, wherever it is.

[7 : 14] And it will be stunning in that it will be an experience unlike anything you have ever had, whether it is good or bad, positive or negative.

It will be stunning and very, very attention-getting. However, there will be no such stunning experience after death if there is no life after death.

Because if there is no life after death, one will be, upon his physical death, swept into complete nothingness.

You will not be capable of being stunned because you will be devoid of all cognitive capability.

You will not experience anything because there is nothing to experience. You will be in a state of non-being in a nothing entity, feeling no pain, no joy, or sensation of any kind.

[8 : 32] For if there is no life after death, when you expire from this life, you will be non-existent in any form.

You will be as non-existent as you were before you were conceived, if there is no life after death.

Now the question becomes, what evidence do we have of either position that there is life after death or there is no life after death?

We have no evidence that anyone can present that demonstrates there is no life after death.

No one of an atheistic bent who believes there is no life after death cannot say, there is no life after death and here is the proof of it.

[9 : 41] Nobody can say that. All that they can offer is that there is no life after death for those who have died physically and then came back to life in this world to live again.

Now they may use that as an argument for demonstrating that there is no life after death and that is the claim that they can make, but it is the only claim.

I buried my dear wife, Barbara, over five years ago. Her body is still buried.

She hasn't come back. And some would say, this has happened to not only millions, this has happened to billions over several millennia.

And they're all still gone. And for them, that may constitute proof positive that they are gone and not coming back and they are gone to nowhere because there is nowhere.

[11 : 10] Death in this life does appear to be final. Our graveyards attest to this very emphatically.

There is no life after death that is like this life in this world, at least to this present time.

And Christians may refer to incidents like our Lord's resurrection and that of Lazarus and the Shunammite son whom Elisha breathed upon and brought back to life.

We may use those as illustrations but they are all historical and we do not have any kind of record of them that we can set forth as any kind of what shall I say ironclad proof.

Those who reject the concept of life after death in order to be consistent must of course embrace atheism because the absence of God and no life after death are joined at the hip.

[12 : 26] Embracing one logically requires embracing of the other. Atheists see the life after death folks as embracing their belief to avoid facing their own mortality.

they tell us that a refusal to face the reality and the finality of death helps to assuage the pain and the prospect of never seeing departed loved ones again.

So life after death folks concoct this scheme of life after death to help them deal with their present grief.

love. The idea of never being able to see loved ones again is an excruciating pain the likes of which we are unwilling to tolerate.

So we conjure up in a wish fulfillment kind of way the whole idea of life after death and a grand reunion and we're going to see our loved ones again and it's going to be wonderful and this is all stuff and nonsense.

[13 : 40] It is a figment of our imagination and it is something that we use to help us deal with the pain of separation the reality of death and the facing of our own mortality.

Some of us our atheist friends tell us are just incapable of dealing with the finality of death so we have to come up with some way to extricate ourselves from that and avoid that pain so this is what we have arrived at.

Those of the life after death persuasion however and this is a two-sided coin those who are of the life after death persuasion see the atheist as accomplishing pretty much the same thing because it is he who refuses to face his immortality and the dread of future judgment and accountability and the atheist comforts himself with the idea that there is no life after death and since there isn't he doesn't have to worry about facing any judgment or any God or any accountability accountability and he certainly doesn't have to worry about anything like hell where he would be punished he comforts himself with the idea that there is no life after death there is no God and there is no future reckoning or judgment so when it comes down to evidence what evidence do the adherence of life after death have we have evidence from two areas first we have anecdotal evidence that is testimony given by those pronounced clinically dead who report having been transported to heaven and witness the afterlife only to return to earth and continue living and they tell people about their experience they write books they appear on talk shows on television and they fill pulpits throughout the land on a traveling circuit giving their testimony of what they experienced when they died were pronounced clinically dead went to heaven visited different ones there saw

Jesus all the rest of it and then came back to this earth that's referred to as anecdotal evidence and this anecdotal evidence should not be coldly dismissed nor should it be accepted as verification of life after death we cannot treat these testimonies however compelling and convincing and sincere they may sound we cannot treat them as verification or empirical proof of life after death the jury is still out so anecdotal testimony you know I don't care what it is you can find somebody who can testify to just about anything somewhere there there is a plethora of people who will stand in line to tell you about their experience of having been abducted by aliens and taken aboard this spaceship where they were scrutinized and analyzed and injected with some mysterious something or other and then they came back to earth and they tell everybody all about it well makes fascinating stuff on television sometimes and books that people read but how much are you willing to stake on that probably not much and

I think wisely so so anecdotal testimony is worthy of consideration but it does not constitute confirmation or verification and all I'm saying is I am not prepared to discount the testimonies that people give when they claim to have had an out of the body experience they hovered above their body in the surgical room they saw themselves pronounced dead and given up by the doctors who were attending them I am not prepared to discount all of this and say there's nothing to it it was merely a neurological malfunction that we don't understand because of the complexity of the brain we are not prepared to eliminate the possibility and say it was just an imagination or they were having some kind of internal seizure and they saw these things that were very real to them but they in fact were not real at all they were just real in their own mind

[19 : 22] I am not prepared to say that and I do not think that anyone should be dogmatic about it either way all I am saying is anecdotal evidence does not constitute hard evidence and the jury as I've said is still out best we can do is meet these things with a big question mark and shrug our shoulders and say I don't know maybe you know I don't know I cannot accept it as hard evidence and I am not prepared to reject it and say those who are claiming these things are all just a bunch of scam artists and they're looking for their 15 minutes of fame and they make these outlandish claims and knowing that nobody can repudiate them and they do it for money or for fame or whatever I am not prepared to say that either and we ought not to be judgmental in and while anecdotal evidence

is not hard evidence it is evidence to at least give serious consideration to but secondly we have biblical evidence and testimony from the

God who cannot lie and in Titus 1 and verse 3 verses 1 through 3 particularly verse 2 well let's read the three verses again Gary read them earlier at the beginning Paul a bondservant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of those chosen of God and the knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness in the hope of eternal life which God who cannot lie promised long ages ago I've dealt with this word hope as it's rendered in the Greek a number of times here at grace over the past 35 years but without giving you a Greek lesson let me just refresh your memory about it the word in the Greek is the word elpis if we were to spell it with English letters it would be elpis and it's pronounced elpis and in the

Greek the word hope conveys an idea of absolute certainty uncertainty it is a word of confidence it is not a word of doubt or uncertainty as is the word hope the way we use it today when we say we hope a certain thing will occur what we mean is we don't know whether it will or not but we want it to we would like for it to however there is always the element of ambiguity we don't know whether it's going to come to pass or not and you need to understand the Bible never uses the word hope that way it uses it as a done deal it is as good as already finished because what is behind it is the integrity of God who cannot lie and when the scriptures refer to

Christ being in you the hope of glory that does not mean Christ is in you so maybe there will be glory by and by you hope you hope you hope but you'll just have to wait and see as to whether or not that transpires never uses the word that way and we ought not to either it means because Christ is in you that is your absolute ironclad sure fire guarantee of glory no doubt about it that's the biblical meaning of the word hope in the absolute confidence of eternal life which God who cannot lie promised long ages ago now while we're in the neighborhood and

Gary gave you a little direction regarding Titus and he used references like Hebrews to kind of get you there so let's go back to Hebrews only this time go the other direction from Titus go back toward the end of the book and come to Hebrews chapter 11 and verse 37 we have a biblical record for which we are unapologetic and we set that forth as being our best and most conclusive and most assurance of the reality of life after death and I suspect that it could be said well just because the Bible says that doesn't make it so well we who know and understand somewhat and believe this old book believe that because the

[24 : 51] Bible says that that does make it so and we have confidence in the book even in those areas that we do not understand as much as we would like because of the areas that we do understand and as I told you many many times over the last who knows how many years the issue always comes down to this same thing you cannot escape it it is always ever present it is the issue and that is the issue of authority what do you accept or recognize as authority and for the believer it is the unalterable inerrant infallible word of God which we accept as our authority we know what man's authority is like it has what it is what has gotten us into the mess we're in that's man's authority and the scriptures present the solution and they also present the cause for things being the way they are and you will not find an explanation anywhere that explains why the world is the way it is other than in the pages of this holy writ from

Genesis to Revelation and because it is such a faithful record of where we have been it is equally reliable for where we are going and where we will have arrived when we get there it is the only real authority that there is history verifies that the person of Jesus Christ has more severely impacted the world past present and future more than any other person who ever lived like him or not believe in him or not that claim is virtually undeniable and we believe it is because he was who he said he was and he is utterly trustworthy he and the word he has provided throughout scripture attests more convincingly to life after death than anything else and there are so many passages that we could refer to but for time sake and for the convenience of locating them we're just going to address a couple of references and one is here in

Hebrews 11 and the others will be in John's gospel which we'll direct you to shortly in Hebrews 11 we have an account given in what is referred to as the hall of faith and it talks about a number of people who have lived before God and man in this world and accomplished exploits of considerable accomplishment and they have passed on we believe they have passed on to glory but the text goes on to read and we'll just jump in here with verse 37 they were stoned they were sawn in two they were tempted they were put to death with the sword they went about in sheep skins in goat skins being destitute afflicted ill treated men of whom the world was not worthy wandering in

deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground and these all these having gained approval through their faith did not receive what was promised they didn't the text says they didn't now the text doesn't say they won't it says they didn't that strongly infers that there has to be something to come in order for them to receive the promise that they never received there has to be a condition whereby they can receive it and this implies the life after death all these having gained approval through their faith did not receive what was promised because

God had provided something better for us so that apart from us they should not be made perfect all this is saying in a very round about way is that those who did not receive the promise are going to and that necessitates an afterlife where they are going to receive the full compliment of what was promised now and there are other passages here in Hebrews as well but we will not take time for them I would like you however to come back to John's gospel very easy to find back in the gospels of the new testament and a very familiar passage that we probably don't even need to turn to but we will it is John 3 16 and of course you realize that all of this business of the afterlife and all of the references that are made to it by our Lord in Matthew Mark Luke and John are all linked to the character and nature and integrity of

Christ who made these statements and in verse 16 of chapter 3 so familiar to everyone for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life some would have to say well that's a nice thought Jesus but you're wrong there is no eternal life because there is no life after death there is only temporal life and it is this present life here and now and when you live it it's gone it's over that's it and there is no more so we have to charge Jesus Christ with one of two things we have to charge him with gross ignorance because he actually thought there was such a thing as an afterlife and eternal life and it was conditioned upon those who believe in him for a happy prospect of this afterlife but he was an ignorant

[32 : 02] Jesus and he just didn't know any better and if that's not the case then he has to be a deceptive Jesus who himself really knew there was no life after death but he thought he could gain more cooperation from people if he let them believe there was so he went around talking about this eternal life thing knowing all the while that there was nothing to it in which case he is a deceiver now in one case you have an absolutely ignorant Jesus who doesn't know any better in the other case you have a deceptive Jesus who is nothing but a con man and in both of those instances he is certainly not fit nor worthy to be considered anybody savior or role model or anything else the only other alternative of course is what he said was absolutely true and he said it because he knew it was true and he said it because it was part and parcel of the message that he came to deliver and in verse 36 of the same chapter he who believes in the son has eternal life but he who does not obey the son shall not see life but the wrath of

God abides on him and all of this is pointing to the future both the eternal life and the wrath of God they are opposites of course eternal life with God or the wrath of God without him and of what does the wrath of God consist it consists of God's justice unadulterated fully deserved justice and when we're talking about wrath and justice they go hand in hand because the justice of God means the sinner receives exactly what he deserves not one smidgen more or less absolute perfect justice and that requires wrath the only question is to what extent in what measure that will be determined by the caliber of justice that is required solemn things to think about chapter five come over just another page

I want you to understand and people who deny and poo poo the idea of an afterlife and a heaven and a hell they need to understand what they are saying must be true of Jesus Christ and are they really prepared to do that you know there is a great deal of even what shall I call it perhaps even maybe sentiment that people have for the person of Jesus that many of them do not have for the Bible it is remarkable and it is very inconsistent but I have talked to people over the you can't believe that stuff it has some pretty good sayings in it and some philosophy of life and everything but we know it's full of contradictions and mistakes and we know it's just a bunch of old men with beards set down and wrote about life as they saw it and that's all the Bible is well what do you think about Jesus oh well Jesus now that's Jesus is he's pretty cool guy he's he's kind of wonderful you know he's he's very very lovable and very holy and very wonderful example great moral teacher now wait a minute wait a minute are you talking about the

Jesus that's found in the Bible that you just denied and ridiculed is that the Jesus you're talking about oh well you well you know see the position is not thought through at all and more people hold these kind of positions because they have heard someone spout off about it maybe a favorite uncle

maybe a biology professor in the university that they attended and they pick up on this stuff but the same person very often is sympathetic and cordial and even complimentary regarding the person of Christ well you shouldn't be you shouldn't be not if you reject the authority of scripture because Jesus goes with it if you're going to discard the scriptures and throw out the Bible throw Jesus out with it he belongs in the trash sheep just like the rest of the book if that's your position be consistent about it but if you are going to accord any authority any right privilege any integrity to the person of Christ you have got to weigh his words weigh them carefully and in John 5 and verse 20 our Lord says for the father loves the son and shows him all things that he himself is doing and greater works than these will he show him that you may marvel for just as the father raises the dead and gives them life even so the son also gives life to whom he wishes for not even the father judges anyone but he has given all judgment to the son in order that all may honor the son even as they honor the father he who does not honor the son does not honor the father who sent him truly truly

[38 : 37] I say to you this is amen amen in the Greek or verily verily he who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and does not come into judgment but has passed out of death into life he's speaking of course spiritually when you receive Christ as your savior you in your human spirit you move from the sphere of spiritual darkness into spiritual light you move from the sphere of spiritual death into spiritual life and that's what Christ is speaking of and if you'll turn over another page to chapter 6 and verse 32 for to him

Lord ever more give us this bread Jesus said to them I am the bread of life he who comes to me shall not hunger and he who believes in me shall never thirst it's an incredible statement for a human being to make you realize that and you realize what kind of authority this person is taking upon himself to make bold statements like this can you think of any other human being in all of your sphere of acquaintance who would dare to utter an expression like this wouldn't you wouldn't you call for the man in the white coach to come and take him away hurts himself or somebody else but I said unto you that you have seen me and yet you do not believe all that the father gives me shall come to me and the one who comes to me I will certainly not cast out for I have come down from heaven not to do mine own will but the will of him who sent me well

Jesus give it up because you didn't come from heaven the reason we know you didn't come from heaven is because there is no such place you're delusional or you're deceptive and this is the will of him who sent me that of all that he has given me I should lose nothing but raise it up on the last day for this is the will of my father that everyone who beholds the son and believes in him may have eternal life and I myself will raise him up on the last day so what do you think yes or no there is no middle ground nobody is going to be raised halfway nobody is going to be almost raised it's either yay or nay as

I said before so say I now again no person has more impacted the world past present and future than Jesus Christ and we believe his influence on the world then and now is for one simple reason that is he is who he claimed to be and he will do what he has promised he will do his word is certain he is the God who has promised eternal life and he cannot cannot lie so have you questions or comments that you would like to share with us we would be happy to hear them is there a roofing microphone out there somewhere somebody have a question feel free to inject it or if you if you're a little shy about expressing it publicly you're always free to write out a question and you don't have to sign it it can be anonymous just write out a question and drop it in the offering box and we will be happy to address it in our next session and as

I mentioned earlier there will be a kind of continuation of this message next week simply because of its importance and we will plan to return the following week I know I said in the bulletin that we would be there next week return to the difficult sayings of Jesus but unlike the Bible you can't believe anything you read in the bulletin so take that take that with a grain of Saul Jesus didn't write the bulletin I can assure you anyone with a question or comment you'd like to register feel free up here Mike if you've got one back there close by go ahead and then Joanne Smart has a question okay did God create all of us saved or unsaved the spirit in us for eternity one one place or another would that be a fair assumption

[45 : 23] I think it is Roger I think I think the idea or the concept of the afterlife is chiseled into the heart of every human being and I think also that has been reflected from time immemorial man has always had some sense of an afterlife he may have had more questions about it than answers and I still do I still have more questions than I have answers but there is that nagging thing inside us that I believe is there for those who will listen to it and it reports that there is something after this life and I

think that is undeniable and that will be part of my content that I plan for our next session too and there's a question up here in the front mic I have another one in your mind God is spirit correct right we don't dare assume that our spirit is anything like

God's that he gave us that we are well I would simply say that I guess I would say yes and no and that sounds like a cop out kind of an answer but I think there is something that we have in common with God's spirit and that is our intangibility when we talk of that which is spirit we are removing ourselves from any expression of the physical or the material and it is very difficult for us to get our brains around that because we tend to think in terms of matter and material substance it's what we're so familiar with and this is this by the way is the big rub with the scientific community science by its very nature is locked in to the physical science for its very definition has to be able to observe weigh measure measure measure consider and you can only do that with the physical you cannot do that with the metaphysical or the spiritual or the immaterial and this leads some in the scientific community to conclude that there is no such thing as that which is spirit because all that exists is matter and matter is all there ever was or all there ever will be and this is

Carl Sagan's philosophy you know the universe is all that there is was and ever will be and there's no room for anything else that's a typical atheist position they are locked into physicality they deny the existence of that which is spiritual and we have a human spirit it is not to be confused with the Holy Spirit every human being has a human spirit and whether he's Christian or not whether he's Buddhist or Brahman or Shinto or whatever he's got a human spirit and it is that human spirit that is able to connect with God who is spirit and we are made in the likeness and image of God and God breathed into Adam the breath of life and animated him and Adam became a living soul and there is so much about this that we don't know and what we're talking about is ourselves and it's embarrassing aren't you embarrassed that you don't know yourself any better than you do we are fearfully and wonderfully made we haven't even scratched the scratch on the surface as to what humanity is all about it's just amazing so we have a spirit and that's what enables us to connect with God and when we are regenerated when we are saved when we come to faith in Christ it is that human spirit immaterial part inside us that nobody's ever seen that's what's regenerated that's what has made a new creation in Christ your body isn't changed it's the same if you were ugly before you were saved guess what you're still ugly but you're beautiful on the inside so we have that common with God's spirit and we're immaterial but then again that which is true of God's spirit is certainly not true of ours because in his spirit he is incomparable and infinite and we are so finite and so limited and I could wax on about that it's one of my favorite subjects but Joanne has a question here comment and

John 6 that you referred to verse 40 and 44 the last sentence of each verse I will raise him up at the last day could you clarify last day well I think that that simply is referring to the time when the trump of God sounds and the graves are opened and the dead are raised incorruptible and we shall be changed in an instant in the twinkling of an eye this corruptible will put on incorruption this mortal will put on immortality this is 1 Corinthians 15 and I think it is a beautiful picture of the life that God has provided for us that will commence when the body which is now corruptible will become incorruptible and our human spirit and

[51 : 36] I take it if I understand this correctly the phrase absent from the body present with the Lord means that your human spirit is absent from the body and James says the body without the spirit is dead the spirit isn't dead but the body is dead the body goes to the ground or the sea or the crematorium and the spirit exits the body and goes to be with the Lord and at the last day that body and spirit are reunited and fashioned like unto the body of our Lord Jesus Christ and that's Philippians I think it's Philippians I think it's Philippians 2 not sure about that and that's in my estimation that's the last day this is the wrap up time we've got we don't have time for another one but we will take another one if somebody has a question that they're just dying to ask

I don't want to cut you off anyone okay thank you for your kind attention and you did really well staying with me through reading all that and I I don't think I even saw any heads nodding and that's a good sign so thank you would you stand please we'll be dismissed loving father we are so grateful for what you have incorporated in your word because apart from it we're just absolutely in the dark we have no clue about what you have provided for the afterlife and we really can't begin to understand what this life is really all about apart from the revelation that you've given us so we bless you and thank you for it and we believe you have given us information so that we can respond to it and be accountable for it and we want to do that thank you most gracious God for all that

you've been pleased to do in
Christ's wonderful name amen