CoreGroup Guide | Afterlife - Part 3
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Welcome

Hello friends! Welcome to the third week in our series called *Afterlife: What Comes Next*? In our first week, we learned about paradise as a resting place for our souls and a place to be close to Jesus right after we die. Last week, we discussed the mysterious and difficult-to-comprehend concept of resurrection and what is said about our spiritual bodies.

This week, well, it's another difficult lesson. If we are to believe that God has created a path through grace to everlasting life with Him, then we also must recognize that an alternate path exists without Him. There is a spiritual crossroads the Bible says exists where judgement happens and that the alternate path away from God leads to a place called Hell. Hold on, friends. This is an unsettling topic that includes concepts of pain and sadness. We definitely need a prayer to start this conversation.

Opening Prayer

Almighty God, while some of the ideas in this series are truly bewildering, the thought of an afterlife that does not include you is absolutely frightening. Please guard our hearts and minds as we discuss what the Bible tells us about judgement and Hell. Send your Holy Spirit to guide our conversations towards understanding. Please bless our time together and lead us towards peaceful conversations. It is in your name we pray, amen.

Icebreaker

When you were young, what was a household rule or punishment that felt completely unfair, even if you see it differently now?

The Head

Our verses this week are taken from the New Testament book of Matthew. Now Matthew was one of the twelve disciples that followed Jesus closely. These verses are from a time when Jesus used a mix of parables and plain talk to describe the crucial importance of spiritual readiness, active love, and eternal suffering for those who rejected God. The verses document a time when Jesus spoke to the disciples at a place called the Mount of Olives. Jesus knew that two days after these words were spoken, he would be arrested in that same garden and crucified. In this passage, there is a sense of urgency in his tone to help the disciples understand God's plans.

> **Matthew 25:31-46**
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> *“Now when the Human One comes in his majesty and all his angels are with him, he will sit on his majestic throne. He will put the sheep on his right side. But the goats he will put on his left.*

“Then the king will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who will receive good things from my Father. Inherit the kingdom that was prepared for you before the world began. I was hungry and you gave me food to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. I was naked and you gave me clothes to wear. I was sick and you took care of me. I was in prison and you visited me.’

“Then those who are righteous will reply to him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you a drink? When did we see you as a stranger and welcome you, or naked and give you clothes to wear? When did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’

“Then the king will reply to them, ‘I assure you that when you have done it for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you have done it for me.’

“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Get away from me, you who will receive terrible things. Go into the unending fire that has been prepared for the devil and his angels. I was hungry and you didn’t give me food to eat. I was thirsty and you didn’t give me anything to drink. I was a stranger and you didn’t welcome me. I was naked and you didn’t give me clothes to wear. I was sick and in prison, and you didn’t visit me.’

“Then they will reply, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison and didn’t do anything to help you?’ Then he will answer, ‘I assure you that when you haven’t done it for one of the least of these, you haven’t done it for me.’ And they will go away into eternal punishment. But the righteous ones will go into eternal life.”

- Two groups are identified at the beginning of these verses. Who are the sheep and who are the goats?
- Another group is identified as “the least of these brothers and sisters.” Who would you identify as that group in today's society?
- There is a reference to a place of “unending fire” that was “prepared for the devil and his angels”. That word “prepared” is consistent with other translations of the Bible. What does it mean about God's authority that a place like this was created?
- What do you imagine Hell is like? What descriptive words come to mind beyond “unending fire”?

The Heart

The concept of spiritual judgement is troublesome because it suggests that there is a real possibility that our choices in this life could lead to eternal fire and damnation as a final destination. Even more troubling is that by the time we are considered for judgement, our time on Earth is done, so there doesn't appear to be a way to change that path once judgement has begun. That is a heavy truth to wrestle with as it feels like a point of no return. How do we know if we are on the right path? There are so many difficult things in this life and sometimes issues are so complex and distracting. If God is love, what would the afterlife look like without God? The anxiety created by judgement and Hell is real. What are we to do?

Well friends, peace be with you. All is not lost and hope abounds. We can keep showing up, wrestling with these hard topics, praying, being honest about our doubts and fears, and helping those in need. Every new day we can actively choose to seek out God’s love.

- How does it impact you to know that Jesus is the final judge, not us?
- What stirs in your heart when you consider people who are “the least of these” and the injustices we often witness in the world today?
- Given that we can’t know for sure what judgement and hell might look like, how can we approach this aspect of the afterlife with humility?
- As you reflect on the scripture above, where do you find a message of hope?
- What questions or concerns are on your mind as we discuss judgement and Hell?

The Hands

In an earlier section of the Book of Matthew, Jesus was challenged in a similar way and we can remember his response as a guide. When he was pressed by a religious leader to name the most important rule to follow, Jesus replied that we are to love God with our whole hearts and we are to love our neighbors as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-39). Jesus affirmed that these two guiding commands satisfy all of the rules in the Bible.

- Keeping in mind that we are all created differently with unique gifts, what are some actions we can take to love God and love our neighbors as ourselves?
- What helps you stay on a path of seeking God and loving the least of these?
- Serving our neighbors can sometimes feel uncomfortable. What are some intentional actions we can take to overcome those barriers?
- How can our group be praying for you this week?

Closing Prayer

Lord Almighty, hear our prayer. Thank you for the wonderful blessing of your love for us. Help us to follow a path with you as we navigate this world. Show us ways to help others and open our eyes to neighbors in need who we can love as ourselves. Forgive us when we miss an opportunity to show love to others and guide our thoughts toward holiness. It is in your name we pray, amen.