



SERMON SERIES STUDY GUIDE

Heaven and Hell, The Reality Of Life After Death, Pt. 5

Pastor John Riggs

Main Scriptures:

- Matthew 12:38-40
- Luke 23:39-43
- Isaiah 53:4-6 (and 10-12)
- Romans 3:21-26
- Hebrews 10:1-10 (and 11-14, 19-21)
- Ephesians 1:3
- 1 Peter 3:18

Key Points:

- Jesus' statement about being in the 'heart of the earth' for three days and three nights, like Jonah, refers to his spirit descending into the realm of the dead (Hades/Sheol), not his body remaining in the tomb.
- The realm of the dead (Sheol/Hades) was understood to be divided into two sections: paradise for the righteous and a place of suffering for the unrighteous.
- Jesus' promise to the thief on the cross, 'Today you will be with me in paradise,' indicates that paradise was immediately accessible after death, and Jesus' spirit went there.
- The crucifixion of Christ was the singular event where God dealt with all sin, past, present, and future, making believers righteous through faith.
- Jesus' descent into the 'lower regions of the earth' (Hades/Sheol) was essential for manifesting God's righteousness apart from the law, enabling justification by faith in Christ.
- God's forbearance in the Old Testament allowed Him to overlook past sins, deeming people righteous through faith in the law and sacrificial system, but these sacrifices were temporary and a reminder of sin.

Question and Answer: (answers provided on pages 17-18 of the study)

Q: What is the 'sign of Jonah' that Jesus referred to?

Q: Where did Jesus' spirit go between his death and resurrection?

Q: What is the significance of the cross in relation to sin?

Q: Why was it necessary for Jesus to descend into the lower regions of the earth?

Q: What is the difference between the current heaven/hell and the final state?

Q: Why did God overlook sins in the Old Testament?

Q: What was the limitation of Old Testament sacrifices?

Q: How is Jesus Christ's sacrifice different from Old Testament sacrifices?

Q: Why are Christians considered holy and blameless if they still sin?

Q: What does the tearing of the temple curtain signify?

Q: What is the significance of Christ descending to the 'spirits in prison'?

Q: What is the meaning of Christ being the 'first fruits' of the resurrection?

Q: Why is knowing Jesus Christ more important than religion?

Sermon Transcript:

Well, we're going to continue on this morning with our series that we have been um doing the last few weeks called Heaven and Hell: The Reality of Life After Death. And last week, guys, I had a really good question that I received from someone here at our church after the morning service. And the question was concerning what Jesus did in the time between his death and his resurrection. And I know that I've touched on this briefly um probably two weeks ago, but I want to go into more detail. We hear lots of preaching about Friday's crucifixion, do we not? Isn't that a wonderful time of year where we celebrate actually for a believer every day we celebrate not only the crucifixion but also what took place on Saturday or Sunday, the resurrection. But very little is taught about what Christ did during the time that he gave his life on the cross of Calvary to provide redemption for lost man and atone for sin of all time and the glorious resurrection. Well, the reality is as soldiers stood watch over the borrowed tomb where the body of Christ was laid, Jesus Christ was actively accomplishing his plan. Where did Christ go and what did Christ do between his death and his resurrection? I know a lot of you are ready to get into the heaven aspect. Like, let's learn more about what heaven's going to be like. Well, it's important that we understand this because it'll help us have another aspect of understanding about heaven as well.

In Matthew's gospel in 12:38-40, if you would like to turn there, we're going to look at this first. Matthew 12:38-40. It is very interesting that many, many people have a great interest in the afterlife, whether they're Christians or non-Christians. People of other faiths, they have questions about the afterlife. But God has given us in his word truth that we can know that is for our benefit. And that's what we're seeking to do over these next several weeks is learn more about what life is like, heaven, and unfortunately, the real aspect of hell. What happens to people who die outside of the saving faith and redemption of Christ? Where, where do they go? What is hell like? What, what's what's that going to be? And then also, we know that the current heaven and the current hell is not the final place of the righteous and the unrighteous. We know there's going to be a new heaven and a new earth. We also know that hell itself will be emptied out in the resurrection that will happen for the unrighteous after the millennial kingdom. And they will stand before the great white throne judgment of God. And if their names are not found written in the Lamb's Book of Life, which they won't be, they will then experience what scripture calls the second death. And they will be thrown like the false prophet and the antichrist into the lake of fire. And this will be forever and ever. And along with hell itself will be thrown there. And so when we're speaking of heaven and hell, what I'm trying to uh make clear to you that I use the word current for a reason because for those of us who die and go to heaven, that's not the place we'll spend eternity, but it's a place where we'll go in the intermediate state between now and the resurrection of our bodies. Same with those in hell.

But in Matthew chapter 12, we're getting back to this question about what did Jesus do during the time of his death and his resurrection. There's some very significant things that Christ did. And we're going to learn about that here today in scripture. So hopefully this will be very, very exciting for you to learn these truths. They are for me. In Matthew 12, Jesus now is speaking to the the Pharisees, which were religious leaders for for over the people of Israel in the time of Christ, and then also the scribes. These men knew the Old Testament. They knew it very, very, very well. And they come to Jesus, they have some questions for him. And he gives them a response. And this is what he says. They want a sign. They want Christ to prove himself to them as if the miracles were not enough and all of the things that he taught, these things were not enough. They wanted a sign. "Give us a sign, Jesus. Give us proof. Give us evidence." And

Jesus says to them this in 12:38. "Then some of the scribes and Pharisees came to Jesus saying, 'Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you.' But he answered them, 'An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.'" Now, these men knew the prophet Jonah well. They knew the story of Jonah. They, they, they understood this in great detail. He says, "The only sign that this generation is going to receive is going to be the sign of the prophet Jonah." And then notice what Jesus tells these who came to him. "For just as that means in the same manner, for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." Jesus says, "The sign that I'm going to give you will be the same sign of that which Jonah the prophet experienced." Jesus here was alluding to his death, his burial, and his resurrection and the time between those two events. And notice Jesus says that the Son of Man that he would be in the heart of the earth. This is very, very important. Some people believe that Jesus, when he died, when he said, "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit," that Jesus was simply at the point of death when he gave up his spirit, ascended to heaven. But that is not what Jesus taught and that is not what scripture teaches. He will ascend to heaven, but not right after his death. We're going to see that as we learn today. He said that the Son of Man would be in the heart of the earth. That his body, though, if we remember, was not buried in the earth. His body was actually laid in a borrowed tomb. A man by the name of Joseph, Joseph of Arimathea, it was a borrowed tomb. In fact, if you go there today, um, in Israel, which I've been there, and you go to, uh, what they call the Golgotha or the place of the skull, they have a tomb there that they have said is the tomb where Jesus was laid. Now, I have no way of believing that it probably is, but it's no doubt a tomb that is very old at the time, probably of Christ, that would have been used by those who had been buried there. But nonetheless, they claim this would have been the place where the body of Jesus Christ was laid. And it's just a big cutout inside of a rock wall. That's all it is. And then there were little beds that were carved out of stone where they would have laid the deceased of the family. As each of them took their place in death, they would unroll the stone, put the body in there, roll the stone back. It was like a burial site for families where they would be buried in these big caves cut back in the rock. And Jesus' body was actually laid in the borrowed tomb of Joseph just because of the speed in which everything was happening at the time of the crucifixion. And then we have the Sabbath and then we have Sunday. And so Jesus was laid there in this righteous man's tomb by the name of Joseph of Arimathea. He wasn't laid in the heart of the earth in his body in the grave, so to speak, but in a tomb. So Jesus is speaking here of something more direct. Jesus, as we're going to see, was speaking of his spirit. His spirit was going to descend into the heart of the earth. So Jesus here is going to give us an important clue as to his whereabouts during the time between his death and his resurrection. He did not say that he would go to heaven to be with the Father. He said that he would be in the heart of the earth. Now, in Hades or Sheol, which is what he says here, that he would be in the heart of the earth. Now, according to the Old Testament, Sheol was the place where all the spirits of both the righteous and the unrighteous went at the point of death. This place was divided into two separate compartments, if you will, by a great chasm, which we've read about already in the story of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke chapter 16 when Jesus shared this story. This story of a man by the name of Lazarus and a beggar who went to Abraham's bosom. And you recall the story where the rich man died and went and he went to a place called hell. That would be the suffering side of the abode of the dead. And then the, the, the poor man, the beggar. He is in Abraham's bosom, which the Jews knew and spoke of as being where the righteous would go. That when they died, it would be the paradise side of this place called Sheol, or the New Testament calls it Hades. The righteous to paradise, the unrighteous to hell, the suffering, the torment side. The tomb was a borrowed tomb. The fleshly

body of Christ would only occupy it for a three-day period. The Jewish calendar. For a Jew, as I mentioned to you, any part of a day counts for a day. And so, for a Jew, Jesus died on Friday. He rose again on Sunday. Those are three literal days to a Jewish calendar. And that's what Jesus, that's this, the true aspect of Jesus' death, burial, and his resurrection.

Now, another clue is found in the crucifixion of Christ, who was crucified between two guilty and sentenced thieves. You remember the story? Jesus died in the middle cross between two thieves. Well, in Luke 23:39-43, if you have your Bibles, turn there. Let's look at this. We're going to receive another clue to where Jesus went during his time between his death and his resurrection. In Luke's gospel, verse 23, chapter 23, turn to verses 39, and we're going to read through through 43. That is Luke 23:39-43. Beginning in verse 39, it says, "One of the criminals who were hanged rallied or railed, excuse me, at Christ, saying, 'Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us.' But the other rebuked him, saying, 'Do not, do you not fear God since you are under the same sentence of condemnation, and we indeed justly.'" In other words, the other thief says, "Hey, we are justly dying for our sins. We are under the same condemnation. Do you not fear God here? For we are receiving the due reward for our deeds. But this man has done nothing wrong." And he said, "Jesus," listen to his faith, "remember me when you come into your kingdom." And Jesus said to him, "Truly I say to you, today, what is today?" Today, today you will be with me in paradise. Now Jesus gave the sign to the scribes and Pharisees that he would give them the sign of Jonah, that he would, like Jonah, be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. Now he tells the thief on the cross that today, that means the moment we die, you are going to be with me in a location. The location Jesus described as paradise. He said, "You will be with me in paradise." The cross is the point in history, guys, that God deals decisively. Now, you need to understand this with all sin, past sin, present sin, and future sin. All sin of all time of all history, all is culminated at the death of Christ on Calvary. This is very important that you understand this. The Old Testament saints all looked forward to the cross of Jesus Christ. You and I, we all look back to the cross of Jesus Christ. Why? Because the shedding of the blood of Christ is the time in which God dealt with your sin, my sin, and the sin of the entire world. That means Old Testament saints, New Testament saints, everyone who has ever lived. God dealt with sin one time for all. And that happened on the cross of Calvary when Jesus Christ gave his life to atone and pay for our sin and appease the wrath of God that we had merited. It all is culminated at the cross of Jesus Christ. This is why what Jesus was doing was so very, very significant. Very significant. Although many people had no idea what Christ was doing while his body laid in the grave, Christ was up to a great work in his spirit.

As we're going to see here in Isaiah 53:4-6, we know the prophet Isaiah here is actually speaking prophetically here. He's speaking of Jesus Christ in Isaiah 53. If you would like to turn there, you can. You don't have to. I'm going to read it to you, but Isaiah chapter 53. I want to show you a few things here that are fascinating. Many of you know Isaiah 53. You would think that the Jews would really understand that Isaiah 53 is speaking of Christ, but many of them do not discuss chapter 53. Isaiah 53:4-6. We want to begin here in verse 4. Listen to what Isaiah the prophet is saying. "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. Yet we esteemed him stricken." This is a prophetic passage here pointing to the death of Christ. He was smitten by God. Who killed who, who crucified Jesus? God crushed his son. God did this. This is the only way we could ever receive reconciliation, forgiveness of our sins, and how we could ever be reconciled to God. It was only one way that it could happen because the first Adam brought the curse. The second Adam, Jesus Christ, the God-man, had to reverse the curse. And the only way this could happen was if he would come and give his life and shed the blood necessary to appease the wrath of God and cover all the sin that we have committed.

"But he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our sins. Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned everyone to his own way. And the Lord has laid on him the sin of us all." And then verse 10 through 12, if you'll jump down a few verses, listen to this. "Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him. He has put him to grief. When his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see the He shall see his offspring. He shall prolong his days. The will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. Out of the anguish of his soul. He shall see and be satisfied. By his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted as righteous. Amen for that. And he shall bear the iniquities." That's the sin. "Therefore, I will divide him a portion with the many. And he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors. Yet he bore the sin of many and makes intercession for the transgressors." As you see here in Isaiah, he is prophetically speaking and speaking to this crucifixion of God, God-man, the Messiah who would come. Speaking of this event, looking forward, the death of Christ appeased the wrath of God for you, for me, and for those who believe in him. Amen.

Now earlier I mentioned that the Old Testament saints, they were waiting for an event. Did you know that we are also waiting for an event? We are, we are waiting for the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. We were waiting for the resurrection of the dead. We're waiting for an event. The Old Testament saints were likewise waiting for an event. And what were the Old Testament saints looking forward to? The first advent of the Messiah, the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, where he would come and he would set up the kingdom and he would, what? He would turn the hearts of the sons to the fathers and he would give them a new heart and he would, he would be their God and they would be his people. They were looking forward to a event that would come. We likewise are waiting, and New Testament saints are waiting for this second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and the resurrection of the dead. The Old Testament saints were waiting for an event. We are likewise waiting for an event.

In Romans 3:21-26, listen, I want to begin to real lay some of these truths out for you so you have a better understanding of why would Christ need to descend to the lower regions of the earth as Ephesians 4 says. Why would Jesus say, "The sign I will give you will be the sign of Jonah where the Son of Man will descend into the heart of the earth or Sheol." Why would that be the case? Well, it was for good reason. In Romans 3:21-26, "But now the righteousness of God has been manifested," Paul says, "apart from the law." How were men in the Old Testament made righteous? Through the law, through the sacrificial system. Paul says, "Now a righteousness of God has been manifest apart from the law. No longer were we placing faith, as it will, the Old Testament saints, in the sacrificial system, the shedding of the blood of a goat or a lamb or a bull. No longer was it that faith in that sacrifice that brought about a righteous standing before God." Paul says, "Now God has manifested a righteousness. It's been made known apart from the law." He says, "Although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe." Now, all history, men are deemed righteous by what? By faith. That's how Abraham, the father of the nation of Israel, he was deemed righteous by faith in God. That's how he was considered righteous. And even before that, we have Noah. And we can go down through different examples. These men were righteous before the law by faith. And now we see that there's a righteousness that God has revealed that is apart from the law. And that is faith in Jesus Christ. And why is this so significant? For there's no distinction. Paul says, this is important. "For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God and are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by

faith." This was to show, do not miss this. Underline this in your Bible if you are an underlining person of scripture. This is important to write it down. Listen to this. "This was to show something very significant. God's righteousness because in his divine forbearance," did you see that word? "He had passed over former sins." Did you hear that? God, in his grace, in his forbearance, had previously passed over sin. In other words, those in the Old Testament, no doubt, were sinners. Paul says, "Christ has not yet died to atone for all sin, but God, because of faith in the law and the sacrificial system, God, in his forbearance, he overlooked their sin by grace as they put faith in what God gave them in order to be deemed righteous." But here's the problem. It didn't take away sin. You say, why? Because Hebrews tells us that the great high priest would have to continuously year after year come and, what? He would make a sacrifice for the sins of the people. Every single year on the day of atonement, the sacrificing never stopped. It continuously happened. Why? Because they still sinned. And there had not yet been the one who would come that would die for once over all sin. Who would cover the payment and a penalty and the justice of God over sin where sin would be covered completely, totally washed away, no longer having any power over us. So the Old Testament saints who were in paradise of God in Sheol, they were waiting for one thing to happen. Those things that the Old Testament prophets were pointing to. The righteous one who would come, this sacrifice that would be made. The one who would give his life to pay for the transgressions and the sins of the world. He was coming and God, in his forbearance, what was he doing? He overlooked former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus Christ." The law was established and set up. Everything in the Old Testament, as we're looking to the feast, the festivals, and the holy days, they were a shadow of the one who was to come. They were all pointing to Jesus Christ. Do you understand that? And when the great high priest would come on the day of atonement, or you would bring a sin offering and they would sacrifice a lamb, and then your hand was taken and it was placed on the head of the lamb to transfer symbolically your sin on the animal that was innocent, and the blood of the animal would be shed, and the faith in this transfer of sin would appease the wrath of God in your life for a season, not long, because you had to do it over and over and over. And when you study the temple, you're going to find something fascinating. There was a place on the day of atonement where the great high priest could only go into one time a year. It was called the Holy of Holies. And that place was so sacred and so holy because in that place the glory of God, God himself would fill that place. And the high priest had to go through a whole lot of stuff in order to get himself prepared to enter into the Holy of Holies. Do you know that God is holy? The reason people don't think much about sin is because they don't understand the holiness of God. And see, scripture says that without holiness, no one will ever see God. Why? Because you can't stand in the holiness of God if you have sin. It's impossible. And the great high priest had an allowance that one time a year. And he better do everything just right. He better dot his eyes and he better cross his tees. And tradition tells us they tied bells to his feet because if he ever stopped ringing, they jerked him out with a rope because God killed him. But the great high priest was to go in and take the blood. And he was to take the blood and he was to sprinkle it on the ark of the covenant and the altar that was there, the horns of the altar. And then in the middle was called the mercy seat. The mercy seat. Aren't you thankful for God's mercy? And they would take the blood and they would spatter it on the mercy seat between the two horns of the altar to receive, as it were, the mercy of God in the shedding of this blood. But God had, in his own forbearance, he had overlooked sin. In other words, their sin was not done away with, nor had it been paid for yet. It hadn't been. See, the Old Testament saints' sin is paid for the same way our sin is paid for, through the blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As we're going to see, he's the only one that could cover the sin by his blood because his blood was pure, holy, and

blameless. Because he's the only sinless one in human form who walked in perfect obedience to God. And just as Adam's sin brought condemnation to all men, Christ's one act of obedience in his atonement has brought justification to us by faith. This is so good. Okay, we got a lot to cover. I've spent too much time in that one spot.

Hebrews chapter 10:1-10. I probably already got ahead of myself, but we'll cover it anyway. I want you to see it in your Bible. Hebrews 10:1-10. See, Christ fulfilled all of that. Christ fulfilled the law. The law is good. Yes. But the law, the problem with the law is the law, as Paul said, taught that he was a transgressor. That which is good to bring life, Paul says, brought death. Why? No man will ever in this life be able to keep the law perfectly. Cannot happen. If you can, you don't need Jesus. But we need Jesus. Amen. We need Jesus in our life. Thank God for his grace. In Hebrews chapter 10:1-10, let's read through this quickly and let's, let's see here what we're going to learn. There's some pretty awesome stuff here. "For since the law," listen to this, "you got to get this too. Since the law has but a shadow, it's a shadow. All it is. Christ the fulfillment. We don't walk in the shadow. You understand that? We walk in the fulfilled one. I don't have to walk in the shadow because the, the, the true essence and substance of the law has come in human form. I don't have to walk in the shadow of the law. Praise God. I walk, what? In Christ. I live in Christ. Paul says, 'For me to live is Christ and die is gain. The life that I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God. I've been crucified with Christ. Therefore, I no longer live.'" Paul understood this in great detail. So, the, the law is a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities. Oh, Jesus is the true form. It can never, listen, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year. Notice this. This word is so incredible. I want you to take a big circle mark and circle this word because this is so incredible to me. He says this, that the same sacrifices offered continually every year cannot make perfect, perfect, underline that, circle it. Cannot make perfect those who draw near because you got to be perfect to stand in the presence of God. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered? Since the worshippers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins. But in these sacrifices, there is a reminder of sins. Every year, what did it remind the, the, the Old Testament believer and saint? Every year, they came to offer what? Sacrifices. Because it's a reminder of their sinfulness. They reminded them year after year. But in these sacrifices, there is a reminder of sins every year. Listen, this is important. "For it is impossible." That's an important word. "It's impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." Consequently, oh, it's getting good. "When Christ came into the world, he said, 'Sacrifices and offerings,' speaking of God, 'you have not desired, but he says, 'A body you have prepared for me. In burnt offerings and sin offerings, you have taken no pleasure.' Then I said, it's Christ speaking, 'Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.' When he said above, 'You have neither desired nor pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings. These are offered according to the law.' Then he added, 'Behold, I have come to do your will.' He does away with the first in order to establish the second. And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ." Listen to this. "Once for all." Did you know this, Christian? Although you are not sinless, you are considered holy in Jesus Christ. Did you know that? Do you know why when you die as a Christian, you get to go be in the presence of the holy God? One reason, not because you in your own flesh are holy. You are not holy, are you? If you say you are, let me spend a few moments with your wife. I can prove to you very quickly you're not your husband. Here's the incredible thing that as a Christian, we are by faith. We are placed inside Jesus Christ. Here's what happened. God placed your sin on the Son, the Lamb of God, who was to be slain before the foundation of the world. You understand? And that's what scripture teaches. Our sin, according to Corinthians, says that God made him who knew no sin to be sin

for us so that we could become the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus. So what did God do? He crushed his Son. And why did he do this? To appease the wrath of God. To make a way where fallen sinful men in Adam could make become perfect or holy, not in their works, but in the one who gave his life, the holy, perfect one, Jesus Christ. This is so significant. Yes, we strive to live a life that corresponds with what it means to be a Christian. We strive to seek after holiness. We want to live a life that honors God, but we cannot perfectly do this. And so God says, you know what? Not one little smidgen of sin is allowed to be in my presence. So I'm going to come in the person of the triune Godhead, the second person, the eternal Son of God, which was established before the foundation of the world, that he would give his life. This is all part of God's perfect plan. And he would crush Jesus Christ, his own Son, and your sin was on him. My sin was on him. The penalty that I had merited, the death that I deserved was all placed on Christ. And he died willingly in your place. Like you're one of the thieves between the cross and Barabbas himself. You and I are Barabbas. And God took the place that he was to take on the cross. And God atoned for your sin. He didn't just atone for yours. He atoned for all the sins of all the past history that he overlooked in forbearance that the blood of goats and bulls could never take away their sin. But in Christ, Christian, he has taken away your sin. You stand justified before God. Do you even know how great this is? You stand righteous before God. You will stand before the holy God of all creation. Why? Because you have been placed by faith in the holy one, Jesus Christ. And you have received his imputed righteousness. It has been stamped on your life. This is amazing. This is the gospel. This is the good news. So as we see here that the blood of goats and bulls could not take away sin. That's why they did it every year. Jesus Christ came and he died once for all. See, this is where the Catholic Church brings in this whole thing of purgatory. You got some sin left on you. So you got to go to purgatory and you got to suffer in the flames and the fire of purgatory because you can't go be in the presence of God because see, you still have the stain of sin. You don't. Jesus Christ died once for all sin. There is no stain of sin for those of us who are in Christ Jesus. You don't need purgatory to burn off any of your stain of sin. Why? Because Jesus Christ himself bore all the punishment, paid all the penalty. He judiciously covered your sin through his blood. You have to understand this. It was a judicial work of God where he had to do this and he purchased your freedom. The moment you and I die as a Christian, you go be in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ and God the Father in the throne room of heaven and all that that heaven is. Why? Not because of your works. Because your works are filthy rags, but because of the work that Jesus Christ did for you and for me. And because you have been placed in Jesus Christ, you will stand before God holy and blameless in his sight. According to Ephesians chapter 1. That's the will of God. In fact, let's look there real quick. I'll show you something. Go to Ephesians chapter 1. Sorry if I'm getting a little excited about this, but man, I love the gospel. Let me show you just something quickly and then we'll get back here where you need to go next. Ephesians chapter 1, start in verse 3. Ephesians 1:3. Listen to this. Listen to this. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places." Listen to this. "Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world." And what was the plan and determined will of God? Here it is. "That we should be holy and blameless in the sight of God." How did that happen? By faith in Jesus Christ. We have received every spiritual blessing of Christ in the heavenly places. We are now in Jesus Christ, Christian, holy and blameless. This was the will of God before the foundation of the world. As we're going to see, let's read on. I want you to see this. "Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, this was God's plan. This was the will of God that you and I would be holy and blameless before him. And there's only one way you can be holy and blameless before God. And that is for those who put their faith and trust in the holy and blameless one who atoned for their sins. That is it."

Now, let's move on to help us understand this a little bit better. Hebrews 10, we're going to move into verses 11-14. "And every priest," there's no need for priests anymore. Amen. That's why when we see these priests that are offering these these these things like the mass and all of this stuff, listen, there's no priesthood needed. You know why? Because the great high priest has come and the great high priest has offered the only sacrifice that ever needed to be offered where no other sacrifice would ever need to be made. Jesus Christ is the great high priest. And you know what scripture says? Who the priesthood is? It's not a bunch of guys wearing their their fish hats and their their cool looking garb and their robes. Nope. The priesthood of believers is you and me. There don't need to be a priesthood anymore. That's a false system, man. It's all a bunch of baloney. You don't need it because the great high priest has already come. No mass needs to be made where they crucify Jesus again every single week. where they pull him out of a box and transubstantiation takes place where the things become the literal body and the literal blood of Jesus and we crucify him again over and over and over again. No, Jesus died once for sin and he rose victoriously from the dead to die again.

That system is false, but it keeps people hooked in. Listen to this. And every priest stands daily at his service offering repeatedly the same sacrifices which can never take away sin. But when Christ had offered, listen to this, this is so important, for all time, past, present, future, he offered for all time, a single sacrifice for sins. What did he do? He said, "It is finished." Number one on the cross of Calvary. Number two, when he ascended, he sat down at the right hand of God. Why did he sit down? He don't have to do any more work because the work's already been done. No more sacrificing, no more work. It has been completely finished.

Guys. This ought to really encourage you, man. Waiting for that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. That's coming. For by a single offering he has, circle this word. Here it is again. Oh, I love this word. We read about it already earlier and I told you to circle it earlier, but here it is again. What has God done in Christ Jesus to you? He has perfected us. He has he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

Isn't that awesome? That's why we get to go be in the presence of God. Man, that's good stuff. Verse 11 says that sacrifices made by priests for the people could never take away sins. Verse 12 says, "And Christ offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins one time." And verse 14 says, "By that single offering, he made perfect all those who are being sanctified." Isn't that awesome? This is exciting, guys.

Now, let's look at Hebrews chapter 10, a few verses down, 19-21. Man, I could go on for an hour. This stuff's so good, I don't even care about eating. And it's going to help you understand why Jesus had to descend to the lower regions of the of of the earth. Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter into what was once forbidden, we have confidence to enter where the holy places. How do we enter in? By the blood of Jesus. By the new and living way that has opened for us through the curtain. What curtain are we looking at here? We're looking at a picture of the temple. And the temple had its separations. And we're curtain we're speaking of is the curtain that separated the holiness of God from unholy humanity. And what happened in Jesus Christ? Man, this is what is amazing. He has opened the curtain. Isn't that incredible?

Do you know what happened when he when he died on the cross and said that he had finished his purpose and he gave up his spirit? Do you know one of the things that happened? Scripture records that in the temple there in Jerusalem that the curtain that separated the holy

of holies from unholy man was rent in two from top to bottom. It is exactly what the writer of Hebrews is saying. Jesus said, "Hey, you don't have to be separated from the holy God anymore because I have made a way for you to enter in to the holy places." That's incredible. That is amazing. And we have confidence to do this. Christ has opened the curtain. The blood of Christ cleanses us from the stain of sin, from sin in general, all of it. Therefore, we can enter into God's holy presence. Verse 19 states that therefore, since we have confidence to enter into both into the holy places by the blood of Jesus, aren't you thankful that you can just go right to the Lord? We don't have to go through anyone else because the mediator's there. The mediator is Jesus Christ himself. And there's only one mediator between God and man. You know who the scriptures say it is? It's Jesus Christ. Amen. Isn't that good?

All right. Jesus told the thief on the cross that today you would be with me in paradise. We have to think about this that Jesus Christ's death, it covered all sin from all time. The sacrificial system never took away sin, but it pointed to the one who would come, the lamb of God, who would be the one who would give his life. The lamb was always pointing to Jesus Christ. The lamb back in Egypt that they actually took and killed a male lamb without spot and blemish. They kept in their home for 14 days. And then they did what? They took that lamb, sacrificed the lamb. What did they do? They took the blood of the lamb and they put it over the doorpost and over the top of their door. And when the angel of God came through to smite all the firstborn in a plague against Pharaoh of Egypt, do you know what happened? All who were inside of the home where the blood of the lamb was was wiped. Did you know what? The angel passed over them. The judgment of God passed right over them. Why? Because of the blood of the lamb.

Amen. From there all the way through scripture, we're seeing this is God's perfect plan of redemption. 1 Peter 3:18. For Christ suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God. Oh, being put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit in which he listen to this. Here's another another clue. Peter here speaking of his crucifixion. And Peter says he was put to put to death in the flesh, but he is made alive in the spirit in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison. Now, we're looking at what we've been been learning about the the sign or the the sign of of of Jonah where Christ would descend into the lower regions of the earth. Now, Peter's saying the same thing. We're learning something about Jesus. His spirit went into where? The lower regions of the earth. And what did he do? He went and proclaimed something. He proclaimed to the spirits in prison. And who are these spirits? Well, now we're going to see who they are.

Now, I want to make this mention to you. Some people say, "Well, Jesus went to hell." No. Jesus descended and told the thief on the cross, "Today you will be with me, not in hell." Where did he say he would be with him? In paradise. There's a difference as we learn from Luke's gospel. And so here we see Christ descends down and he's doing something while everyone above the ground is mourning for Jesus, those who followed him. All the activity going on with the religious leaders and we got the Sabbath taking place and we got disciples hiding out and all that's going on. We got mourning and grieving and his body being wrapped and prepared. Everything's going on up there. The grave is sealed. The soldiers are standing keeping watch. And all the while that it fa it looked like God was doing nothing. God was doing something because God is up to something here. He went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison because they listen to this formerly did not obey when God's patience waited in the days of Noah. Who are the spirits we're looking at here? These are those that were wiped out in the flood. Hebrews tells us that or Peter tells us, excuse me, that Noah was a preacher or a

herald of what? Righteousness. And that God had made a way for sinful man to be spared by faith in this righteous gospel. That Noah proclaimed to his generation. And God had him build this ark in order that he could be spared and saved from the coming judgment of God. This is all part of the beautiful picture of Jesus Christ who is the ark of God in which we enter in and where we are spared from the wrath of God. Noah during the time that he was there building the ark being mocked at by men. Hey, what are you building? I'm building a boat. Why? Because God is going to send a flood and destroy all of the unrighteous. They mocked and laughed and made fun of. And God did what? Waited patiently. God is still waiting patiently for people today as the gospel is still being proclaimed. And maybe you here today, you've been you're not a Christian. You come week after week and the gospel is shared through the scriptures of of of God's word. And you you've you've God's waiting patiently, but there's coming a day where the ark will no longer have an open door. The ark will be shut. It's coming. God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being prepared in which a few that is eight persons who were brought safely through the water. So one of the things that Christ was doing, Noah was a preacher of righteousness. Man, he descends into the lower regions of the earth. And what is he doing? He is proclaiming. We don't know all he's proclaiming there, but no doubt he is the righteous one. He is the ark. He is the one who had the open door. He's all of those things.

Ephesians 4:8-10. Let's look at that. Ephesians 4:8-10 is actually taken from Psalms 68:16, but let me read it to you. Paul says, "Therefore," it says, "When he ascended on high, he led a host of captives and he gave gifts to men." In saying that he ascended, Paul says, "What does it mean but that he had he had also descended into the lower regions of the earth?" Into the lower regions. He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all heavens that he might fill all things. Psalm 68:18 says this, "You ascended on high, leading a host of captives in your train, just like a conquering king, coming back from his great victory. Jesus Christ, when he ascended on high in his train, he led a host of captives." Who do you suppose the host of captives were? Oh, all of those who were in the paradise of God, Jesus Christ had at that point in time his blood covered all sin, atoned for all sin. And because of that, they were righteous and holy and blameless before God. And now in the presence of God, they could go.

Psalms or John 20:17's speaking to Mary after his resurrection. This is very important. Jesus says to her, why? Because Mary Magdalene loved Jesus and after he rose from the dead and she encountered Christ, she couldn't help but grabbing a hold of Jesus. And notice something that Jesus says to her, this is after his resurrection. Now, do not cling to me, speaking to Mary. For I have not yet ascended to the Father. This is right after his resurrection. But go to my brothers and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father to my God and your God. At this point after the resurrection, Christ tells Mary Magdalene, I have not yet ascended to the Father, but you go tell the brothers that I am ascending to my Father and your Father. And when he ascends, he's going to lead a train full of captives with him when he goes. There's some other things I want to show you here if you all have time. It will only take another hour, but we'll get there. No, here we go. Let me let me finish this so I don't want to have to get to this next week.

Matthew makes a very very important point that at the crucifixion of Jesus Christ there was a great earthquake. A great earthquake. And it mentions in Matthew that the tombs were opened. This earthquake was so violent that the rocks that covered the tombs were shook completely and the tombs were laid open. But notice there were many resurrected saints. Let me read this to you out of Matthew 27:52-53. You can turn there if you want to. We got all day.

The teachers are going to say, "No, you don't. They love your children." By the way, did you know that yesterday I became a grandpa? Yeah. Yeah. Yes. I hope that's Cheers for for uh fun things to come. Amen. Yeah. Absolutely. All right. Let's not get sidetracked. Here we go. Notice what Matthew records here. The tombs also were opened. This is when Christ gave up his spirit. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. And coming out of the tombs after his resurrection, they went into the city and appeared to many. Now, this is important. Matthew makes the point that at the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, when the earthquake took place, the tombs were opened. It's very interesting that Matthew points out though that those whose graves were opened did not come out of the graves until after the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Now, I do not think it's probably very likely that they were raised from the dead and stayed in their tombs for that period of time between the death and the resurrection of Jesus. I believe that the resurrection happened when Jesus Christ was resurrected because he's the first fruits of the resurrection of the dead. He is the first fruits. And when Christ was raised from the dead, some of the saints were also raised from the dead. And the earthquake that opened their graves gave them an open door to go out of the graves and into the city of Jerusalem. What an uproar this must have caused.

Here's another aspect of this of what I think really took place here. When we think about what we read in Ephesians where where we know that Christ led a host of captives in his train, isn't it interesting that we have at the resurrection of Christ, we have resurrected saints coming to life and going out into the city? Here's what I think is my opinion. Now, there's two two different opinions on this or probably more than that. I do not believe that those who were resurrected from the dead died again. I believe that they went into the city to accomplish something very important to speak to the credibility and the power and the finality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And I believe that these are the first fruits who resurrected and were led by Christ into the glorious throne room of God, never to die again. They were waiting for something. We are waiting for something.

John Calvin remarks on this passage as follows, "Another and more difficult question is what became of the saints afterwards, those that raised from the dead. For it would appear to be absurd to suppose that after having been once admitted by Christ to the participation of new life, they again returned back to dust. But as this question cannot be easily or quickly answered, so it is not necessary to give ourselves much uneasiness about a matter which is not necessary to be known. That they continued long to converse with men is not probable. But it was only necessary that they should be seen for a short time than in them as in a mirror or resemblance the power of Christ might plainly appear. As God intended for their persons to confirm the hope of the heavenly among those who were then alive. There would be no absurdity in saying that after having performed this office, they again rested in their graves. But it is more probable that the life which they received was not afterwards taken from them, for it had been a mortal life. It would not have been a proof of a perfected resurrection. Now though the whole world will rise again and through Christ will rise up the wicked to judgment as well as believers to salvation. Yet as it is especially for the benefit of his church that he rose again. So it is proper that he should bestow on none but saints the distinguished honor of rising along with him."

Matthew Henry says, "Some think that they rose only to bear witness of Christ's resurrection to those to whom they appeared and having finished their testimony retired to the graves again. But it is more agreeable both to Christ's honor and theirs to suppose though we cannot prove

Answers to Study Questions:

Q: What is the 'sign of Jonah' that Jesus referred to?

A: Jesus stated that the only sign given to the generation seeking one would be the sign of the prophet Jonah. Just as Jonah was in the belly of a great fish for three days and three nights, Jesus would be in the 'heart of the earth' for a similar duration, signifying his death, burial, and resurrection.

Q: Where did Jesus' spirit go between his death and resurrection?

A: According to the sermon, Jesus' spirit descended into the 'heart of the earth,' which is understood as Hades or Sheol. This realm was divided into paradise for the righteous and a place of suffering for the unrighteous. Jesus' promise to the thief on the cross indicates he went to paradise.

Q: What is the significance of the cross in relation to sin?

A: The cross of Christ is the pivotal point in history where God dealt with all sin – past, present, and future. Jesus' sacrificial death atoned for the sins of the entire world, appeasing God's wrath and providing redemption for all who believe, both Old Testament saints and New Testament believers.

Q: Why was it necessary for Jesus to descend into the lower regions of the earth?

A: The descent into Hades/Sheol was necessary to manifest God's righteousness apart from the law. This act allowed for justification by faith in Christ, fulfilling the witness of the law and prophets and establishing a new way for humanity to be made righteous before God, as explained in Romans 3:21-26.

Q: What is the difference between the current heaven/hell and the final state?

A: The sermon explains that the current heaven and hell are intermediate states. Believers will eventually inhabit a new heaven and a new earth, while the unrighteous will face the second death in the lake of fire after the great white throne judgment. Hell itself will eventually be emptied into the lake of fire.

Q: Why did God overlook sins in the Old Testament?

A: God overlooked sins in the Old Testament out of His divine forbearance and grace. This allowed people to be deemed righteous through faith in the law and sacrificial system, even though Christ's atoning sacrifice had not yet occurred. It demonstrated His righteousness in the present time, showing that He might be just and the justifier of those who have faith in Jesus Christ.

Q: What was the limitation of Old Testament sacrifices?

A: The Old Testament sacrifices, though necessary, could not permanently take away sin. They were repeated annually on the Day of Atonement and served as a continuous reminder of

sinfulness. The blood of bulls and goats was insufficient to fully appease God's wrath or cleanse sin completely.

Q: How is Jesus Christ's sacrifice different from Old Testament sacrifices?

A: Jesus Christ's sacrifice was a single, perfect offering made 'once for all time.' Unlike the repeated animal sacrifices that only reminded people of their sins, Christ's blood was pure and blameless, completely paying the penalty for sin and offering total redemption. This single act sanctified believers and made them perfect in God's sight.

Q: Why are Christians considered holy and blameless if they still sin?

A: Christians are considered holy and blameless not because of their own sinless nature, but because they are 'in Christ.' God placed their sins on Jesus, and in return, imputed Christ's righteousness to them. This is a judicial work where Christ bore the punishment for their sins, and they are now seen as righteous through faith in Him.

Q: What does the tearing of the temple curtain signify?

A: The tearing of the temple curtain from top to bottom at Jesus' death symbolizes that the barrier between God and humanity has been removed. It signifies that believers now have direct and confident access to God's holy presence through the blood of Jesus, the new and living way, without the need for an earthly mediator.

Q: What is the significance of Christ descending to the 'spirits in prison'?

A: The sermon interprets Christ's descent as a proclamation to the spirits who disobeyed God in the days of Noah. It signifies His victory and authority, even over those who faced judgment. This event is linked to His ascension, where He led a host of captives, including Old Testament saints, into God's presence.

Q: What is the meaning of Christ being the 'first fruits' of the resurrection?

A: Christ being the 'first fruits' means His resurrection is the initial offering that guarantees and anticipates the future physical resurrection of all believers. Just as the first grain symbolized the coming harvest, Christ's resurrection assures believers that they too will be raised to eternal life in God's presence.

Q: Why is knowing Jesus Christ more important than religion?

A: The sermon argues that religion, which often relies on human works and rituals, cannot save and can even lead people astray. Knowing Jesus Christ personally, through repentance and faith in His atoning sacrifice, is the only way to salvation and a relationship with God. Religion is presented as a system that can keep people bound, while knowing Christ offers true freedom and eternal life.