

"Your Destiny"

You have a soul that will last beyond this life. What is your destiny? Hello, I'm Phil Sanders. And this is a Bible study, "In Search of the Lord's Way." Stay with us and we'll explore what God says about our destiny.

Welcome to In Search of the Lord's Way. We're here to search God's Word because we want to know His will. The Bible says in Deuteronomy 29:29, that "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe the words of this law." God doesn't answer every question that we can ask, but God does give us everything that we need to know, everything that pertains to life and godliness. And if you wish to live with God eternally, you can do nothing more valuable than to study God's Word. And we're always so delighted when you spend this time with us. We want to be a part of your life each week.

Hebrews 9:27 says, "it's appointed for men to die once and after this *comes* judgment." From our earliest days we've heard about the Day of Judgment. We've heard about heaven and hell. We know something exists beyond this life, but we don't know everything we'd like to know. Movies and television stimulate our imagination, but they only provide someone's guess about what lies beyond. We want to know what God says will happen when we die. And that's why we go to God's inspired Word for answers.

Today we're going to talk about a very sensitive subject, so I want to speak to you personally. I hope that this time will be like two friends having a heart-to-heart conversation. Life is short, and death is certain. And even if you're young and healthy, you can't escape reality. Your death will either open the door to the most wonderful experience that you've ever enjoyed or the worst experience that anyone could have. God wants to bless you, and the Bible gives us the information we need to find that blessing.

Now this month we're offering a copy of this little booklet, *Your Soul*, and it's free of charge to all who ask. We'd love to send you one. And if you'd like a printed copy or a CD of our study, then mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or you can call our toll-free telephone number. That number is 1-800-321-8633. We also stream this program on our website www.searchtv.org.

The Edmond church will now worship in song, we'll read from James 4:13 to 17, and we'll explore what happens to us when this life is over.

Our reading today comes from the letter of James, chapter 4, verses 13 to 17. "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.' Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You're *just* a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, *you ought* to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.' But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin." That's the Word of God speaking to us, letting us know that we never need to be presumptuous. Let's pray together. Father we're thankful that You have given us our life, and we know that there is a life to come. Father help us to do the right thing. And may Your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

The word "death" occurs 150 times in the Old Testament and 120 times in the New Testament. Now death signifies separation. Physical death separates the body from the spirit. Spiritual death separates people from God and His blessing. The good news is that while death is a separation, it is not the end of our existence.

The Bible describes death in James 2 verse 26 “For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.” Now notice that it says the body is dead without the spirit. But we’re more than a fleshly body. As we’ve talked about, we are body and spirit. The body dies but the spirit still exists. Ecclesiastes 12 and verse 7 says, “that the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.” When we die, our spirits return to God who made us. God is the Father of spirits according to Hebrews 12 and verse 9. Now your spirit is not physical or material, and it’s not destroyed by a physical death.

On the cross you remember, Jesus told the thief, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23 and verse 43). The Lord clearly says that we’ll survive and be conscious beyond this life. The Lord expected to see the thief in Paradise. Now there’s an inner spirit that survives death and is conscious. Life here and now is not all there is, there’s more.

Yes, it’s appointed for men to die once, and then comes judgment. And death holds a lot of mysteries for us. The unknown, especially judgment, is frightening. We worry whether our after life will be one of peace or not. The Lord Jesus said Matthew 7:13 to 14, “Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.” Well this surprises many who think nearly everyone will be saved and only a few of the worst will be lost. But that’s not what Jesus says.

We must consider the afterlife. And how we live will determine where we will spend eternity. What are we saved by? Well, the shed blood of Jesus Christ and the grace of God. What are we saved from? Well, the penalty of sin. Jesus warned in Matthew 5 verses 29 to 30, that “If your right eye causes you to sin, why tear it out and throw it away. For it’s better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it’s better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.”

The Lord Jesus gives us a glimpse of what happens after death in Luke 16 verses 19 to 31. Let’s listen to what He says. “Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day. And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, and longing to be fed with the *crumbs* which were falling from the rich man’s table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores. Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham’s bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. In Hades (the Bible says) he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom.

And he cried out and he said, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.’

But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and *that* none may cross over from there to us.’

And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father’s house—for I have five brothers—in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’ But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ But he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!’ But he said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.’”

Now many think this story is a parable or some kind of fanciful story and for that reason shouldn't be taken seriously. But Jesus never speaks about trivial matters. When Jesus uses a figure of speech like a parable, He does so to emphasize a point not to trivialize it.

However one takes this story, people will face two very different destinies after they die. One destiny is filled with comfort and the other with agony. Lazarus and the rich man both knew where they were. Both could reason and have intelligent conversations. Both could remember the lives that they lived back on earth.

Sometimes the Bible speaks of death as "sleep." But this is likely because the physical body after death appears to be sleeping. This, however, doesn't mean that our spirits are unconscious or in a stupor. You'll remember Moses and Elijah, though they had been dead for many centuries, had a conversation with the Lord Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration as Matthew records it in chapter 17, verses 1-5. Death happens to the body, but death doesn't make our spirits unconscious.

The lives that we live now, whether we're right with the Lord, will determine our future destiny. Now this illustration story of Lazarus and the rich man opens our eyes to what happens when our spirits leave this world. After we die, the angels will come for us to take us to the place God has assigned for us. After death comes judgment. This may be a place of comfort or a place of torment.

Scripture uses the word "Hades" to describe that unseen (that's what the word "Hades" means, is unseen place) where the disembodied spirits of dead people go. "Hades" literally means "unseen." Hades shouldn't be confused with Hell. Hades is a temporary place, where the spirits reside until the Judgment Day; but hell is eternal. No one will enter the promised heaven or the eternal hell until after the resurrection. Hades is the place where only spirits of dead people reside. At the resurrection, our spirits will return to earth and will be joined to new, imperishable bodies. Death is the separation of the body and spirit. Resurrection takes place when our spirits are reunited with a changed, imperishable body.

While Hades usually refers to that place of torment, the word can also be applied to refer to the entire realm, which is divided into both a place of torment and a place of comfort. In Acts 2 and verse 27 the apostle Peter quotes David's prophecy in Psalm 16 verse 10 about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He noted that Jesus' soul was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh suffer decay. When Jesus died, his soul went to Paradise, according to His statement to the thief on the cross in Luke 23 and verse 43, he said "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise."

Well the word Paradise is used three times in Scripture, and each time refers to that heavenly realm where the righteous go after death. 2 Corinthians 12 verses 2 to 4, it says Paradise is equated to that third heaven, that is the place where God dwells. Jesus went to that unseen place of righteous spirits where God dwells. And so, in Revelation 2 verse 7, the Paradise of God is where the tree of life is. If Jesus' soul was not abandoned to Hades but He went to Paradise, then Hades must contain a place where righteous souls are comforted.

The apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 5 verses 6 to 9 also helps us to understand that we will have an existence in spirit form after we die and until the resurrection. He says when the righteous die, they will go to be with the Lord Jesus. He said: "Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body that we're absent from the Lord— for we walk by faith, not by sight— we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord. Therefore we have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him." When the righteous die, they go to be with the Lord.

Again, Paul said in Philippians 1 verses 21 to 23, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. But if I am to live on in the flesh (he says), this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I don't know which to choose. But I'm hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart (that is to die) and to be with Christ, for that is very much better." Paul said he would go and be "with Christ" when he died. This is the Christian hope, to live with our Lord Jesus forever and ever.

Through the years at funerals I loved the reassurance of Romans 14 verses 7 to 9. The Bible says, "For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living." We may die physically, but not even death can separate us from the love of our Lord Jesus. When Christians die, they go to be with Him that very day. But when evil people die, the angels take them to a place of torment.

And this is why we must be prepared spiritually. No one else can do that for you. The Bible says in 2 Corinthians 5 and verse 10, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil." The saved in Christ go to judgment washed clean by the blood of Jesus; and their names are recorded in the book of life. They can face the afterlife with confidence that they have an eternal home with the Lord. The unbeliever and the impenitent person have no such hope. He must face God on his own without their sins being washed away. And they will be lost eternally.

Now God doesn't want anyone to be lost—He wants everyone to be saved. He wouldn't have sent Jesus to die painfully on a cross, if He were looking to condemn everybody. But God won't make people repent and He won't turn their lives around, and He won't make people believe in Him or love Him. You see, that is your decision. Now you are a free moral agent, and your deciding whether you will serve Him or you won't serve Him.

God has prepared the way for your salvation in the gift of His beloved Son, Jesus. By His grace you are saved. But grace as a gift must be received by faith and obedience. We don't earn our salvation, but God has determined that those who receive His gracious salvation are people who meet his conditions.

The Bible says in Hebrews 5 verses 8 to 9, that "Although He (that is Jesus) was a Son (that is a son of God), He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation." Now your gift of salvation is ready for you if you believe, repent and your baptized. My friend, have you prepared? Death is something that all of us will face one day, and it may come sooner than we think. Are you prepared? Are you prepared? Let's pray together. Father we're so grateful that through the blood of Jesus You have prepared a way for us to be saved. And to come to You and to be right with You in the end. And Father we pray that You will give us the hope and the faith that we need, to be willing to obey You and to serve You. And may Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus name, Amen!

I bought life insurance to protect my wife and to provide for my family after I'm gone. I've known people to buy a plot, choose the casket, and arrange the funeral service long before the time. And how foolish I think it is to be so well prepared for the dying and the death here but fail to prepare myself spiritually for the hereafter. I don't want to be like the five foolish virgins, who failed to buy the oil needed for their lamps. You remember, they ran to the dealers to buy oil; and while they were gone, the bridegroom came. And the door was shut, and they were not allowed in. (Matthew 25:1 to 14). We must prepare now before the time is up.

Don't waste your opportunity to get right with God; once life is over, there isn't any second chance. Why not start a new and different direction for your soul's sake, and those you love? Jesus said, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. And if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I'll come in to him and eat with him, and he with me" (Revelation 3 and verse 20).

Friend, you can lose your car, your house, your health, or your life and still go to heaven. But if you lose your soul, you've lost everything. Make the most important commitment that you'll ever make, that of giving yourself to the Lord by obeying the gospel. Believe in the Lord Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. Repent of every sin. Confess the name of Jesus, and be baptized in water in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. When you're baptized, the Bible says in Acts 22:16 that God will wash your sins away. The Lord will add you to His church, and you'll be a child of God with eternal life. Would you do that?

We hope that you're thinking about your soul. We have this little booklet called "Your Soul" that we have been offering this month, and we'd like to give one to you. You can have it or a CD of this message, just mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org.

Or you can call the Search office toll-free at 1-800-321-8633. Now our programs appear on our website at www.searchtv.org. We also offer free Bible Correspondence courses to help you learn more about God's will. Now if you want one of these courses, just write us, let us know. We also offer free study sheets that go along with our programs. You can download them free before each program at our website or you can call and request them. Now when you try to get a hold of us, we're not going to beg you for money or put you on a list.

We do ask that please worship with a church of Christ in your area. Now they're the reason we don't ask for money. And if you are looking for a church home, one that's sound and one that loves the Lord, and will love people. We'll be happy to help you find one. Churches of Christ love and they want guests, and you'll be glad that you went and worshipped with them. Well we'll be back next week, Lord willing. So we ask that you keep searching God's Word with us, tell a friend about this program, let everybody know about the Search program. And call them and tell them about it. Let them know that we love people. And as always we say, God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.