SEARCH185

The Four Last Things: Death, Judgement, Heaven and Hell

Thank you for joining us today for the SEARCH 185 podcast. I am here with my co-host Henry Avila, How are you doing today, Henry? . . . This past week we have seen war break out in the middle East and it has re-ignited the interest on the topic of Jesus' return or Judgment Day. What are your thoughts on the subject of our Death and The Day of Judgment?

Thank you Jody . . . I would like to first address the overall topic of The Judgment by stating that we will all face Judgment, either when Jesus comes back at the 2nd Coming or when we die before the 2nd Coming. Either way, judgment comes to all of us. In either case, we will be destined for one of two places, Heaven or Hell. I believe that we should focus on the more likely account that we will die before the 2nd Coming of Jesus. We should be ready to face judgment, because tomorrow is no guarantee. But first let's start from the beginning . . .

> **Gen 3:19** *In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return.*

Death (memento mori)

Ø Death is the end of man's earthly pilgrimage . . . When "the single course of our earthly life" is completed, we shall not return to other earthly lives: "It is appointed for men to die once." There is no "reincarnation" after death. (CCC 1013)

Ø And just as it is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment (Heb 9:27).

Ø Physical death of the body is certain and occurs once. For us as believers, death should not be something we fear, because we know this is not our home . . . Heaven is our home.

Ø Even so, we resist death at all cost because we know that we were not made for death, but life everlasting. If death was part of our nature, we would experience it in the same way that we accept that we must breathe and eat . . . it is part of who we are.

Ø I want to see God, and in order to see him, I must die. (St. Teresa of Avila, Life, Chapter 1)

Ø "I am not dying, I am entering life." (St. Therese of Lisieux, The Last Conversations)

So you mentioned that in the Word of God, Hebrews Chapter 9, it says that after we die, judgment is passed on us . . . what does that mean and what does that look like?

Judgment

Particular (Individual) Judgment The Catholic doctrine of the particular judgment is this: that immediately after death the eternal destiny of each separated soul is decided by the just judgment of God. We must note here that God does not send anyone to hell . . . we are all given a choice here on earth to come to KNOW, LOVE and SERVE God and CHOOSE Him over choosing the earthly things. As our creator, he designed us to love Him above all things as our source of life and to love one another. . . and ultimately He has revealed Himself through His son, Jesus the Christ. We CHOOSE to follow his commands on how to live a life of faith and love or not . . . When we are judged, we will know that we have either chosen eternal life with God or chosen to reject God and remain apart from God for all eternity – that is what we call Hell.

> **2 Cor 5:10** *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body*

This doctrine of individual judgment is not explicitly taught in Scripture but it is taught implicitly.

- Ø When Jesus said to the thief on the cross, "This day you shall be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43).
- Ø Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom judgment was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God (Rev 20:4)
- Ø As the earliest Acts of the Martyrs and Liturgies attest, the martyrs were persuaded of the prompt reward of their devotion. This belief is also evidenced by the ancient practice of honoring and invoking the saints.
- Ø Second Council of Lyons (1274) declared that souls free from sin are at once received into heaven.
- Ø Theologians suppose that the particular judgment will be instantaneous. At the moment of death the separated soul is internally illuminated as to its own guilt or innocence and of its own initiation takes its course either to hell, or to purgatory, or to heaven

How is this “particular” or individual judgment different from the judgment at the 2nd coming of Jesus Christ.

General (Universal) Judgement

Ø The General Judgement will occur at the Second Coming of Christ when he "comes again in glory to judge the living and the dead." (Nicene Creed) This judgement is the time when Christ will gather all of creation and publicly pass judgement upon it. It is a universal world judgement on those still living on earth.

Ø The General Judgement is also known by the following names in the Scriptures: Parousia, Day of the Lord, or the Appearance.

When will it occur? As to the time, "It is not for you to know the times or moments. . . " Scripture tells us, but to always be ready because "the Day" will come "as a thief" in the night (Mt 24:42-44)

Where will it occur? All the texts in which mention is made of the Parousia, or Second Coming, seem to imply clearly enough that the general judgment will take place on the earth.

How will it occur? At the Second Coming, Christ will appear in the heavens, seated on a cloud and surrounded by the angelic hosts (Mat 16:27; 24:30; 25:31). The angels will minister to the Judge by bringing all before Him (Mat 24:31).

Who will be judged? All humanity, both good and bad, will appear in the judgment to give an account of their deeds. The angels and the demons will not be judged directly, since their eternal destiny has already been fixed.

What will be judged? The judgment will include all works, good or bad, forgiven as well as unforgiven sins, every idle word (Mat 12:36), every secret thought (1 Cor 4:5). It is at this time that all human beings will receive back their physical bodies, thought in a perfected state.

> **Rom 2:5-7** *But by your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed. For he will render to every man according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life.*

I know that in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 24, verse 36, Jesus says that we won't know the time of his 2nd coming, but it does say that we will see signs that point to it . . . can you elaborate on this . . . ?

SIGNS THAT ARE TO PRECEDE THE GENERAL JUDGMENT

1. General Preaching of the Christian Faith. Concerning this sign the Savior says: "And this gospel of the kingdom, shall be preached in the whole world, for a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come" (Mat 24:14).
2. Conversion of the Jews. According to the interpretation of the Fathers, the conversion of the Jews towards the end of the world is foretold by St. Paul in the Epistle to the Romans:

> **Rom 11:25-26***: "For I would not have you ignorant, brethren, of this mystery, . . . that blindness in part has happened in Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles should come in. And so all Israel should be saved as it is written: There shall come out of Sion, he that shall deliver, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob".*

3. Return of Enoch and Elijah. The belief that these two men, who have never tasted death, are reserved for the last days to be precursors of the Second Coming was practically unanimous among the Church Fathers (Concerning Elijah - Malachi 4:5-6; Enoch see Ecclesiasticus 44:16)
4. A Great Apostasy. As to this event St. Paul admonishes the Thessalonians (2 Thes 2:3) that they must not be terrified, as if the day of the Lord were at hand, for there must first come a revolt (the apostasia).
5. The Reign of Antichrist. In the passage (2 Thes 2:3 ff.) St. Paul indicates as another sign of the day of the Lord, the revelation of the man of sin, the son of perdition. "The man of sin" here described is generally identified with the Antichrist, who St. John says is to come in the last days (1 John 2:18).
6. Extraordinary Calamities in Nature. The Scriptures clearly indicate that the judgment will be preceded by terrifying disturbances of the physical universe (Mat 24:29; Lk 21:25-26).
7. The Universal Fire. In the Apostolic writings we are told that the end of the world will be brought about through a general destruction by fire, which, however, will not annihilate the present creation, but will change its form and appearance (2 Peter 3:10-13; cf. 1 Thes 5:2; Rev 3:3, and 16:15).

8. The Trumpet of Resurrection. Several texts in the New Testament make mention of a voice or trumpet which will awaken the dead to resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:52; 1 Thessalonians 4:15; John 5:28).
9. "The Sign of the Son of Man Appearing in the Heavens." In Matthew 24:30, there will be a sign immediately preceding the appearance of Christ to judge the world. By this sign the Fathers of the Church generally understand the appearance in the sky of a Cross of some sort.

Once the General Judgment has occurred, is everyone worthy of eternal life going to be in some heavenly place? If so, what will it be like?

Heaven

We must understand that heaven is not a “place” in our universe. It is like another dimension. We cannot get into a spaceship and travel to heaven, because it is outside of created time and space. Heaven is known as the place where God and His angels reside. They are constantly with God and see His face. The souls of the just persons are also with God in heaven (2 Cor 5:1). Thus the term heaven has come to designate both the happiness and the home of the just in the next life. What does it mean to see God “face to face?” This is what we call the beatific vision.

Heaven and the Beatific Vision (prior to the 2nd Coming of Christ)

Ø In heaven the just will see God by direct intuition, clearly and distinctly. Here on earth we have no immediate perception of God; we see Him but indirectly in the mirror of creation.

> **1 Cor 13:12-13** *For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood. So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.*

Ø Scripture tells us that we will see God face to face and we will see Him as he is. This was defined by Pope Benedict XII in 1336 as a dogma of the Church.

Ø In order to see God, the human intellect of the blessed is supernaturally perfected by the gift of glory. This "light of glory" is infused and allows the souls in glory to see God with their intellect, just as material light enables our bodily eyes to see material objects.

- Ø God will be the primary object of our beatific vision. The other things (secondary) that we will be aware of are things like the other blessed souls in heaven, those on earth, and the reasonable things we were interested in knowing while on earth.
- Ø Although the blessed “see” God, they will not be able to comprehend Him fully, because God is absolutely incomprehensible to the created intellect. We cannot by a single act of our intellect represent every possible creature individually, clearly, and distinctly, as God does; such an act would be infinite, and an infinite act is incompatible with the nature of a created and finite intellect.

So, will we be perfectly happy in Heaven? And will we still have free will?

Supernatural Character of Heaven

- Ø Yes, we will be perfectly happy in heaven and this happiness is everlasting. (Mt 25:45-46).
- Ø There will be various degrees of beatitude corresponding to the various degrees of merit. This merit is measured by how much we have loved on earth, but no one will feel shorted of their place in heaven . . . Everyone will be completely filled with joy, just in various capacities (example of a full cup and a full barrel).
- Ø The souls in heaven will still have free will but will not sin. All the happiness that we seek will be perfectly fulfilled in heaven and the perfect Good will satisfy our desire for happiness. This perfect Good is God himself. That means that the “good” that we desire here on earth is actually a desire for the Greatest Good, which is God.
- Ø In heaven there is not the least pain or sadness; for every natural desire will be finally realized. The will of the blessed is in perfect harmony with the Divine will; they feel displeasure at the sins of men, but without experiencing any real pain.
- Ø Those in heaven will delight greatly in the company of Christ, the angels, and the saints, and in the reunion with so many who were dear to them on earth.
- Ø After the resurrection of the dead, meaning after the 2nd Coming of Christ, the union of the soul with the glorified body will be a special source of joy for the blessed. All creation will be restored to its original plan, like the Garden of Eden, and we will then be fully human.
- Ø What do I mean by “fully human?” . . . before the 2nd coming, we are disembodies souls like the angels, but we are not angels, we are human beings. Humans, by definition are both body AND soul.

So what is going to happen to those who are destined to Hell and what is Hell like?

Hell

Hell is the place of punishment for the wicked and unrighteous after death. Those who die in mortal sin will definitely be consigned to hell. Mortal sin is that sin which severs the life-giving grace of God. Without God's saving grace, we cannot be saved. Examples of mortal sin are any violations of the 10 Commandments and the moral laws mentioned by St. Paul in

> **Gal 5:19-21** *Now the works of the flesh are plain: immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.*

And 1 Cor 6:9-10

Mortal and venial sin can be seen in Scripture

> **1 Jn 5:16-17** *If any one sees his brother committing what is not a deadly sin, he will ask, and God will give him life for those whose sin is not deadly. There is sin which is deadly; I do not say that one is to pray for that. All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin which is not deadly.*

In Scripture, hell is also called . . . Gehenna, (Mt 10:28) "place of torments" (Lk 16:28), "Lake of fire" (Rev 20:10 and elsewhere), "furnace of fire" (Mt 13:42, 50), "unquenchable fire" (Mt 3:12, and elsewhere), "eternal fire" (Mt 18:8; 25:41; Jude,7)

Will there ever be a chance for those in Hell to not be suffering?

Hell is Eternal

The Holy Bible is quite explicit in teaching the eternity of the pains of hell. The torments of the damned shall last forever and ever (Rev 14:11; 19:3; 20:10). They are everlasting just as are the joys of heaven

> **Mt 25:46** *And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."*

Note: * God is not only infinitely good, He is infinitely wise, just, and holy. * No one is cast into hell unless he has fully and entirely deserved it.

Ø The damned will feel a pain of loss . . . The loss of heaven, hope and faith.

Ø The damned will feel a pain of sense. Punishment will be real and in some sort, felt.

We have talked about Death, Judgment, Heaven and Hell . . . where does this idea of Purgatory come into play?

Purgatory

First I would like to say that the Catholic Church teaches that everyone in Purgatory is destined for heaven, and it is not a “second chance” to avoid hell. Purgatory (Lat., "purgare", to make clean, to purify) is a condition of temporal (for a limited time) punishment for those who, departing this life in God's grace, are not entirely free from venial faults, or have not fully paid the satisfaction due to their transgressions. As an analogy . . . let’s say you stole $500 from someone and you repent of the sin. God forgives you . . . so do you now go and spend the $500 on something you want? No, you make some kind of restitution . . . return the money or give it away to a charity.

Temporal punishment due to sin, even after the sin itself has been pardoned by God, is clearly the teaching of Scripture. In the New Testament as well as in the Old, almsgiving and fasting, and in general penitential acts are the real fruits of repentance (Mt 3:8; Mt 5:25-26; 2 Sam 12:13-14). In context, Jesus is talking about our Judgment using a parable . . .

> **Mt 5:25-26** *Make friends quickly with your accuser, while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison; truly, I say to you, you will never get out till you have paid the last penny.*

Both Scripture and Tradition testify to the existence of a place that is not Heaven nor Hell, but a place of purification that the Catholic Church calls Purgatory. Where do we see this in Scripture? First the OT . . .

The practice of praying for the dead (2 Macc 12:38-45),

We can see in the 2nd book of Maccabees that offering up prayers for the dead was “a holy and pious thought.” These fallen warriors had sinned by carrying an amulet on their person, but vs. 45 tells us that they were still to receive a “splendid reward” because they died in “godliness.” Judas Maccabeus takes up a collection to have a “sin offering” done on their behalf. The offering was an “atonement for the dead that they might be delivered from their sin.”

The Christian equivalent is the offering of the sacrifice of Christ to the Father as the “atonement for the dead.” We do this most perfectly in the Mass.

Prayers for Those Killed in Battle 38 Then Judas assembled his army and went to the city of Adullam. As the seventh day was coming on, they purified themselves according to the custom, and they kept the sabbath there.

39 On the next day, as by that time it had become necessary, Judas and his men went to take up the bodies of the fallen and to bring them back to lie with their kinsmen in the sepulchres of their fathers. 40 Then under the tunic of every one of the dead they found sacred tokens of the idols of Jamnia, which the law forbids the Jews to wear. And it became clear to all that this was why these men had fallen. 41 So they all blessed the ways of the Lord, the righteous Judge, who reveals the things that are hidden; 42 and they turned to prayer, begging that the sin which had been committed might be wholly blotted out. And the noble Judas exhorted the people to keep themselves free from sin, for they had seen with their own eyes what had happened because of the sin of those who had fallen.

> *43 He also took up a collection, man by man, to the amount of two thousand drachmas of silver, and sent it to Jerusalem to provide for a sin offering. In doing this he acted very well and honorably, taking account of the resurrection. 44 For if he were not expecting that those who had fallen would rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead. 45 But if he was looking to the splendid reward that is laid up for those who fall asleep in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. Therefore he made atonement for the dead, that they might be delivered from their sin.*

In the NT - Purification of the saved (1 Cor 3:15)

In 1 Cor 3:11-15 11 For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if any one builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— 13 each man's work will become manifest; for the Day† will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. 14 If the work which any man has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. 15 If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

We see that our works, referred to as "building with gold, silver, wood or hay," are going to be tested by fire on the "Day," which is our judgment day. This "fire" is what the Catholic Church refers to as the "purification fires of Purgatory," like gold is purified with fire. These fires will "test" our works and if they are built upon with "wood, hay or straw," they will burn up and there will be a "suffering" associated with that purification process, BUT "he himself will be saved."

† 3:13, the Day: i.e., the day of the Lord, God's searching judgment.