

## Life, Death, Then What?

1. Warm up: What aspect of heaven do you most look forward to – other than reuniting with loved ones and seeing Jesus?
2. Death is our greatest enemy. It snatches away people that we love dearly and ultimately will do the same to us. In some sense, we spend our whole life running from death. So on Sunday we wrestled with what we should do with that.
  - a. In your own life, what death has most affected you? How did it make you feel?
  - b. Someone once said, “At some point in life, we come to the place where we realize that we have more waiting for us in heaven than we have left here on earth.” What do you think that means? Are you at that point yet in your life?
  - c. Imagine if you knew that someday in your old age you would die on, let’s say, May 3<sup>rd</sup>. Each year when May 3<sup>rd</sup> rolled around, how would you think and feel on that day? Would you do anything special on that day? In general, being as honest as we can be, how do you feel about death?
3. One of the worst things about death is separation from those we love. Jesus’ disciples faced exactly that situation in our Gospel reading when Jesus gave them some terrible news. Read John 13:33 – 14:3, as printed on p. 3.
  - a. What the disciples experienced in this passage is like what we experience when we’re in a room where a doctor announces that one of our loved ones is terminally ill. Have you ever experienced that? Describe what it was like?
  - b. In response to the disciples’ distress at the prospect of losing him, Jesus gave them a great promise: “In my Father’s house are many dwelling places. . . . I go to prepare a place for you . . . , so that where I am you may be also.” But should we believe that? As thoughtful people, why should we believe that? Jeff offered two thoughts. Many theologians have argued that the greatest evidence for life after death is the resurrection of Jesus and the amazing transformation the disciples experienced in the aftermath. When Jesus died, the disciples were in utter despair. When they first heard Mary Magdalene claim to have seen the risen Christ, they were deeply skeptical. “These words seemed to them like an idle tale, and they did not believe.” Luke 24:11. But then they too began having encounters with the risen Christ that were so convincing they were transformed into passionate believers who became martyrs for the faith because they refused to deny what they had seen. How do you assess the strength of this argument? Do you find it compelling? Why or why not?

- c. When the ancient evidence of the resurrection is coupled with modern evidence that our consciousness (i.e., soul) can exist beyond our physical body, the case for life after death becomes even more compelling. Read what Dr. Bruce Greyson says on p. 3. What do you make of what he says? Do you find it compelling?
4. So if there is life after death in a place called heaven that still leaves the question: who gets in? John 3:16 responds this way, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that whoever believes in him will not perish, but have everlasting life.”
    - a. The key word in that verse is “believe.” In many churches, “believe” has become synonymous with orthodoxy, i.e., embracing all the right doctrinal ideas about God. In other words, it’s a mental thing. But that’s not what “believe” meant in early Christianity says biblical scholar Diana Butler Bass. To the early Christians, “believing” was about the heart, not the head. What’s the difference?
    - b. Have you ever known someone who seemed to have the heart of Jesus even though they weren’t orthodox in their faith? Do you think they’ll be in heaven? Why or why not?
    - c. Have you ever known someone who was very orthodox and conventionally religious, but whose heart seemed gnarly? Do you think they’ll be in heaven when they die or will they first need some further work in the other place?
  5. Once we think through who gets into heaven, the next question is what will it be like. I Corinthians 2:9 says, “No one has ever seen, no one has ever heard, no one has ever imagined what God has prepared for those who love him.” Paul encountered heaven in a near death experience where he says he experienced things “that no words can describe.” II Corinthians 12:4. What do you make of these verses? What do you think they mean?
  6. Although there’s much about heaven beyond our earthy ability to comprehend, here are three core biblical teachings about heaven: (a) We will all be together again; (b) We will live in close-knit community in modest communal dwellings, rather than lavish gated mansions; and (c) Heaven will be a place where we do our most significant work.
    - a. Besides Jesus, who do you most long to be back together with in heaven and why? How do you imagine you will feel in that initial moment of reunion?
    - b. Are you disappointed that you won’t live a mansion? How does the idea of living in simple dwellings arranged around shared courtyards sit with you?
    - c. How do you feel about being put to work in heaven? What would be your dream assignment?

## **John 13:33 - 14:3**

<sup>33</sup>Children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, "Where I am going, you cannot come." <sup>34</sup>I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. <sup>35</sup>By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.'

<sup>36</sup>Simon Peter said to him, 'Lord, where are you going?' Jesus answered, 'Where I am going, you cannot follow me now; but you will follow afterwards.' <sup>37</sup>Peter said to him, 'Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.' <sup>38</sup>Jesus answered, 'Will you lay down your life for me? Very truly, I tell you, before the cock crows, you will have denied me three times.

<sup>1</sup> 'But do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. <sup>2</sup>In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you? <sup>3</sup>And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.

## **Interview of Dr. Bruce Greyson**

The interviewer asks, "How did you first get interested in near death experiences?" Greyson replies, "It wasn't willingly, I'll tell you that. I grew up in a scientific household. And we never had any thought about anything spiritual or nonphysical. So I went through college and medical school with that materialistic mindset. But in my first week or two of my residency, I was confronted by a patient who was unconscious. I couldn't talk with her about her condition, so I talked with her roommate who'd brought her in. I spoke to the roommate in a different room, and came back and saw the patient. She was still unconscious, and I had her admitted to the ICU. When I saw her the next morning, she had regained consciousness. I introduce myself and she said, 'I know who you are. I remember you from last night.' That kind of blew me away. I didn't know what she was talking about. She proceeded to tell me about the conversation I had with her roommate in a separate room, including intimate details, and I didn't know what to make of that. But I was an intern. I wasn't there to deal with my problems; I was there to deal with hers. So I just kinda pushed it out of my mind. But over the next several years, I saw more and more patients coming forward with stories like that, and finally realized, as a scientist, I can't ignore these things. I need to look at them – see what's going on here. So I started collecting cases and studying them, and now a half century later I'm still trying to understand them."