

“IS THERE LIFE AFTER DEATH?”

JOHN 11: 25-26

APRIL 4, 2010 – SUNDAY 11:00AM – DR. JACK GRAHAM

[applause] It's our prayer that you experience the reality of Jesus Christ in your life, and that the power of the resurrection would be your life and power for your living.

Take your Bibles and turn with me to... to the book of John chapter 11... John's Gospel chapter 11. We're beginning a series of messages on this Easter morning called STRAIGHT UP- bold biblical answers to life's most important questions. And we're going to tackle some of the toughest issues of our times, of our culture, of the church.

For example, next week we're going to deal with the question: Are all religions the same? That's a big question today. People want to know do all paths... all religious paths or otherwise... lead to the same conclusion? We're going to deal with the subject: When does life begin? That's a critical issue. We're going to talk about same-sex relationships: Are same-sex relationships really the same? We'll talk about the Bible: Can you trust the Bible? And so on... We're going to walk where angels fear to tread, if you will, and go straight up from God's Word with a view from a tomb... that's the empty tomb, because we have to ask and answer life's most important question, the question of all questions, first, and it is this: “Is there life after death?... Is there life after death?”

Now it would be very foolish to live a lifetime and not contemplate that question; to consider deeply the consequences of your choice regarding eternal life. Everybody thinks about life after death at one time or another. Perhaps all your life you've been thinking about it. I know I have. I remember thinking about it as a little boy. One thing that helped me think about it was back in the fifties ah... our parents... most parents taught their children a little prayer that went something like this at bedtime: Now I lay me down to sleep/ I pray the Lord my soul to keep./ And if I die before I wake(!) [spoken loudly] [laughter]/ I pray the Lord my soul to take.” Well that got my attention as a little boy, I tell ya! And began thinking about it. And through the years, of course, from time to time unless you suppress it or... or deny it, you ask yourself this question: Is there really something more? Is there really something else?

Now science has attempted to answer this question. I was intrigued to read a Time Magazine article recently that addressed the question of life after death. States that “theologians can debate all they want but radiation oncologist, Dr... Dr Jeffrey Long says if you look at the scientific evidence, the answer is unequivocally “yes! Drawing on a decade's worth of research on near-death experiences (that is, people who apparently died and came back from the other side), work that includes cataloging the stories of some sixteen hundred people who have gone through them, he makes the case for the controversial conclusion in a new book, Evidence of the Afterlife. “Medicine,” Long says, “cannot account for the consistencies in the accounts reported by people all over the world.” So this scientist and others are saying, only... we can only go so far. We don't know what's out there but apparently due to the evidence and the report of people who have been clinically deceased... there's such consistency in what they are telling us that there must be life after death. But, of course, we know science really can't answer this question. This question is beyond science. Philosophy can't answer this question, though the philosophers have debated it and discussed it for generation after generation.

One day Simon Peter said to Jesus, [John 6:68] “*Lord, to whom shall we go. You and You only have the words of eternal life.*” He understood what we need to understand, that immortality... the immortality of the soul can only

be discussed in the framework of the Bible and specifically, for those of us who are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, through the empty tomb.

Ah... the... the fact is that we're not ready to die until... or ready to live, I should say, until we're ready and prepared to die! The Bible says [Amos 4:12] *“Prepare to meet your God!”* And the way to experience life after death is to first experience life after life! So Jesus spoke to this eternal question in John chapter 11, verses 25 and 26:

25) *Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?”*

The fact is your soul was made by God to be immortal. And you... the real you, the part of you that God made, knows and sees, the part of you that live forever... will be alive somewhere, either in heaven or in hell, for time immortal! It is the signature of the soul; every person innately and instinctively knows that there's something else, something more, something beyond! Every person!

Job said it a long time ago. He asked the same question. It's an ancient question, [Job 14:14] *“If a man die, shall he live again?”* And all of life is about getting ready for life on the other side. God has set eternity in His heart... our hearts, according to the Scripture, which means that there's a natural homing instinct, if you will, as God puts in some of His creation... a homing instinct for a place that we've never been before, and that place is eternity.

And when you settle this issue of eternity then your days on earth will begin to matter; the choices that you make, your own character, your convictions, your priorities and plans for life. I don't know what's on your “bucket-list”... the list you may have made of things to do before you die... but you better make sure that at the top of your list is to ask [tap] and answer [tap] sincerely this question: “If a man dies, shall he live again?” And to settle your eternal destiny! That's first and foremost!

So many don't know what Easter is really all about, especially young people. There's an increasingly secular view of quote “religious” holidays, and you ask many people today, even in churches across the world, “What is Easter about?” and ... and they don't have a clue. And yet, if Christ is not risen our faith is foolish and futile. The very essence of Easter... the very essence of the Christian faith is the reality of the resurrection of Jesus.

Listen to what Billy Graham said, “The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the chief proof of the Christian faith. It is the truth that lies at the very foundation of the Gospel! Other doctrines of the Christian faith are important but the resurrection is essential! Without a belief in the resurrection there can be no personal salvation!” No salvation! No life! No purpose! No future! Apart from the resurrection there is no Savior!

But when you experience Jesus and His resurrection and eternity, the issues of eternity are settled in your heart so that you know that you're going to be with Him, then your entire mindset on earth changes. Your focus changes from here to eternity! And the point, and the resurrection and eternity becomes the reference point for everything that you do. As the Scripture says, [Colossians 3:2] *“Set your mind not on things below, but on things above.”* Yet some people never do that. They live for here and now and that's it. It's the age old philosophy of eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow you die!

Jesus talked about a man like that in the Bible. He was a wealthy man and he was stacking up his crops and building bigger and bigger barns ... barns to house the harvest. And he made so much money that he decided to retire and just to enjoy the good life. And about that time a knock came at his door [knock, knock, knock, knock, knock,] and it was death. And death said, [Luke 12:20] *“You fool... you fool! Today your soul is required of you.”* You see, there are consequences... there are consequences... eternal consequences of rejecting the resurrection.

And so that’s why it’s so important that you answer this question, and answer it well. That wealthy fool in the Bible was a kind of nowhere man.

You know John Lennon of the Beatles began writing some music later on in their career as a singing group that was more philosophical than some of the early stuff like “I Wanna Hold Your Hand”. He began writing some philosophical ah... ki... styles of music, and one of those, perhaps as evidence of his own life and lifestyle, he said, “He’s a real nowhere man, sitting in his nowhere land,/ making his nowhere plans for nobody./ Doesn’t have a point of view; knows not where he’s going to./Isn’t he a bit like you and me?” A nowhere man, a nowhere woman!

Yet, God loves you! You were made to love Him back. He loves you so much that He died on the cross to pay the penalty and the price of sin and death! And you can know not just existence beyond the grave, but eternal life today and tomorrow!

So I have two simple points to make: One, is death after life? This passage, given to us by Jesus... these words were spoken at the funeral of His good friend Lazarus whom He raised back from the dead. And it’s in the entire context of death and sorrow and grief! And I’ve always thought poor Lazarus, he had to die twice! Because while Jesus brought him back from the other side, ultimately like every person, Lazarus had to die again finally.

So the obvious point is taken and made... made today and that is that you and I... we are going to die. It is a fact... a sobering fact, a grim reality of life. The latest statistics I’ve read is one out of one [laughter]! There’s no escaping it. It’s unavoidable, it is inevitable!

Now some of you are already thinking, “Don’t talk to us about death on Easter, for goodness sake! Talk about the sunrise; talk about the springtime; talk about bunnies! [laughter]” No, we need to have a talk about the reality of death because we do think about it. We’re the only ones in the creation of God who really do.

Ah... Toynbee, the great historian, said, “Man alone has foreknowledge of his coming death, and, possessing this foreknowledge, has a chance, if he chooses to take it, of pondering over the strangeness of his destiny. He has at least a possibility of coping with it, since he is endowed with the capacity to think about it in advance and to face it and deal with it in some way that is worthy of human dignity.” I don’t believe Toynbee knew the power of the resurrection, but he was right when he said we are the only ones that think about it.

We have two great Beagle dogs that we love... Yogi and Duce. I’ve never one time seen them contemplating eternity. [laughter] They think about chasing rabbits, they think about their food, ah... they think about ah... you know, where they’re going to go to bed. But they don’t think about eternity. We think about it because that’s the way God made us. He wants us to think about it. He wants us to consider it and contemplate this. And we must all come to terms with our own mortality!

Sometimes death is unexpected, at other times it is long and laborious. Sometimes it happens to babies and children and teenagers and we call that premature. Sometimes it happens to older adults and it is a slow, dehumanizing process that the elderly suffer year after year until they die. But the Bible talks honestly and openly about death because it’s such an important subject.

Genesis 3[:19] *“By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground; for out of it you were taken: for you are dust and to dust you will return.”* The psalmist said, [Psalm 89:48] *“What man can live and never see death? Who can deliver his soul from the power of Sheol... Sheol?”* Psalm 90 and verse 10 (New Living), *“Seventy years are given to us. Some even live to eighty. But even the best years are filled with pain and trouble. Soon they disappear and we fly away.”* Or the writer in Ecclesiastes [Ecclesiastes 3:1-] *“For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die;”* Ezekiel 18:20: *“The soul*

who sins, the prophet said, shall die.” Or to the New Testament in Romans 5 [1:12], “Therefore just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin; and so death spread to all men because all sin.” Or again in 1 Corinthians 15, “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.” The half-brother of our Lord, James, who believed after the resurrection, said this (this is the Philips Paraphrase)[James 4:14] “How do you know what will happen even tomorrow? What, after all, is your life? It is like a puff of smoke, visible for little while and then dissolving into thin air.”

And then go all the way to the last book of the Bible. [Revelation 20:11-15] *“Then I saw a great white throne, and Him who was seated on it, and from whose presence earth and sky fled away; and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne; and books were opened: and then another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it; death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them: and they were judged, each one of them according to what they had done. And then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death (the lake of fire). And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life he was thrown into the lake of fire.”*

From Genesis to Revelation [pastor beats out a drum rhythm] it’s the drumbeat of death; all the way through the Bible and, yes, through life! Death is an appointment that we all must keep. [Hebrews 9:27] *“For it appointed unto man once to die and then the judgment!”* And what we do this side of eternity with Jesus Christ determines, according to the Scripture, our eternal destiny! Because, though the soul is immortal... and as I stated earlier, you will be alive in eternity somewhere... not every one is going to heaven.

Some people think the only thing you have to do to go to heaven is to die. Seventy-six percent of Americans believe in heaven, but many have no idea as to how to get there. They just think it happens when you die. Most think if you’re good enough you’ll get there. But this is an appointment we all must keep. So death... death after life...

But let’s turn it over and in conclusion, and this is a great conclusion, talk about life after death. Jesus said, *“I am the resurrection and the life.”* You see life is in a Person, not in a process, but in a Person. That’s why the Apostle Paul said,[Philippians 1:21] *“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”* Resurrection means life! And the supreme evidence of immortality is the empty tomb!

The founder of ever great world religion is buried; you can go to their grave! You can go to the grave, as I have, of Abraham in Hebron... Hebron in Israel. You can go to Mohammed’s grave! You can go to the tomb of Buddha! But when you go to find the tomb of Jesus you’ll never find it! There are traditional places where He was buried and those places are empty! Because the tomb is empty!

Now life after death with God, therefore, is not universal. By that I mean life with God in His presence is not universal. That doesn’t mean to say you are immortal that you’re automatically going to go to be with God. Nor does life after death mean annihilation or the cease... cessation of existence. Nor are we reincarnated from one life to another life, or from one body to another body. [Hebrews 9:27] *“It is appointed unto man once to die, and then the judgment!”*

So life after death means the life of Christ! What was that life of the resurrection? It was a physical resurrection, not just a spiritual resurrection. The soul and the body are raised, therefore, like Jesus. [1 John 3:2] *“We shall be like Him for we will see Him as He is.”* Jesus was raised from the dead physically after three days in the tomb. People touched Him! They put their hands in His side; they embraced Him! He touched them, He transformed their lives. He was real! He was recognizable, though in a transformed, resurrected body, it was the same Jesus! Though his body bore the earthly scars of the cross, His body is now transformed and resurrected and ready for heaven!

This is the hope we profess! Not mere existence somewhere on the other side, not a state of mind of happiness out there somewhere, but a resurrection, for the dead in Christ shall rise! And we will go to a place that we've never been before, that Jesus said is like the Father's house. It's home... home to a place that we've never been before.

I love the story of the older gentleman who was getting ready to pass over to the other side. He was a strong believer but he was saying to some of his friends, “You know, when I was a little boy, when people talked about heaven... when I thought about heaven, I... I thought only of big churches and large buildings with spires and golden streets and bells ringing and choirs singing and angels flying. But then several years came and went and I had a little brother who died and went to heaven. And after that I never thought of heaven as just being a place of golden spires and streets of gold and choirs and all the rest, but I thought of a place where there was one tiny little face and one person that I knew.”

He said, “Later I met Jesus and Jesus changed my life. And now after all of these years, when many loved ones and friends have gone on before me to heaven... my wife now in heaven,” he said, “when I think about heaven, I don't even think about the big buildings and the churches and the streets of gold and the choirs, but I think about the host of family and friends who are there, and most of all, my Savior who waits to welcome me home.” I tell you, heaven is a sweeter place to our family this year. It is a more beautiful and wonderful place when you know not only that your loved ones and friends are there, but that you know you will join them.

David, the great king, lost an infant son. And while the son was dying, he was... he was a mess: he was crying, he was praying, he was fasting; but when the child died, he changed his clothes, he took a bath, he put a fresh face, and he began to praise God. And they said, *“O, king, how is this that while the child was alive you wept, but now that he is gone, you worship?”* And he said, *“I can't bring the child back, but I can go and be with the child.”*

Because Jesus came out of that grave we can go to be with Him and we can live forever with our family and friends who have received Him. Thank God for the hope of the resurrection! Thank God! It's worth shouting about!

William Sangster was a great preacher of another generation! He was ah... he suffered from muscular atrophy and he began losing muscle control to the degree that in his final days he was unable to speak. So on his last Easter he wrote a letter to his daughter. He said, “It is terrible to wake up on Easter morning and have no voice with which to shout, ‘He is risen!’ But it would be still more terrible to have a voice and not want to shout!”

Well, I tell you today I want to shout! Jesus is alive! [Amen!] I want to shout [applause] that He is Lord! Not just on Easter but everyday! Death has lost its power as though the stinger has been removed! Jesus has reversed death by the resurrection! And not only has He given us eternal life to live forever, but internal life to live forgiven and fulfilling. You see, the Christian life is not my feeble efforts to be like Jesus, but it is Christ living in me His life! It is the life of the resurrection! Jesus came back from the grave to prove there's life after death with Him.

So you have a question now to answer; we all do. Jesus stated it. Do you believe this? Do you believe this?

Every head bowed and every eye closed. If you believe, thank Him right now for the eternal life, the forgiveness of sin, the full life that He has promised to all who believe. Not without difficulty and tests and trials and struggles. In fact when you come to Christ your struggles may just begin in some ways. But there is with Him the promise that He will meet your every need and supply abundantly every need in your life so that you can live fully and completely for Him.

But if you today would like to pray and receive Christ into your life, let this be your prayer:

Lord Jesus, I do believe. I believe You died on the cross for my sins. I believe You rose again. ...

The Bible says,[Romans 10:9] “*If we confess with our mouths the Lord Jesus and believe in our hearts that God has raised Him from the dead, we will be saved.*” So confess Him as your Lord and Savior. [Acts 2:21] “*For whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.*” And call upon His name right now. And then promise to live for Him. Just say:

Lord, in the power of Your Spirit I will live and follow You all the days of my life till You come [tap] for me.

Thank Him for hearing your heart and your prayer. And then in just a moment when we stand together and sing a hymn of decision, I want you to come forward as Christ has commanded us to openly confess Him and profess Him.

Our ministers are going to be standing here at the front and upstairs in the balcony for those of you seated upstairs. And we’re waiting for you to come and say, “Today I’ve seen Jesus. I know Jesus is alive! I’m trusting in Him!” Make that decision, Settle this today. Answer that question today! Don’t walk out of here still wondering... still worrying about what it’s like on the other side. You can settle that question now. You can be secure in Christ. You can know that every sin is forgiven.

You say, “I thought church was just for all the good people.” It’s for every person. Jesus died... [Romans 5:8] “*While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*” All of us have sinned. But we have a wonderful Savior. Come to Him.

There are others who need to come and join this church today; to make this church family your family spiritually, and to be a part of this church membership. Why don’t you come today and lead the way and be an example to others who will follow you for the first time to Jesus?

Others may want to come and rededicate your life. You [tap] need [tap] God [tap] to turn [tap] your life [tap] around [tap]! Why don’t you allow Him to do that today? By praying and then purposing in your heart to dedicate the rest of your life to following Him full throttle.

Lord Jesus, thank You for this moment of tenderness and decision [music begins] in peoples’ lives. Thank You for the work of Your Holy Spirit in worship and in the Word. And now in this time of invitation may You bring unto Yourself all who will say “Yes, I believe in the resurrection and the life!” Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

