

Where Are the Dead?

The Question: Where do the righteous go at death?

The Answer: Directly into the presence of God – Heaven!

Introduction

As I was growing up, I heard countless sermons from Luke 16:19-31 (the rich man and Lazarus) describing the state of the dead. Charts depict a great circle with two compartments, a great gulf cutting diagonally across. The rich man is in flames, a compartment called “Tartarus,” and Lazarus is in “paradise.” A line indicating judgment at the last coming of Christ is drawn to the right of the great circle indicating that those who are in these places will be thrust into new abodes on the final Day. This implies that Abraham’s Bosom and torments are merely waiting places, or, as is often stated, “the intermediate state.”

As it turned out, the chart was used primarily as a means to an end – the end was that Christ is coming and we had better get ready. I certainly have no quarrel with that important message. What began to bother me, when I looked more closely at this text, is that much of what was on the typical chart was not even in the text. Furthermore, in the context of Luke 16, Jesus is clearly not speaking about “the state of the dead,” but to, and about, the Pharisees love of money (vv. 14-15). Jesus says that the things that are “highly esteemed among men are detestable in the sight of God” (v. 15). That’s why this incident about Lazarus and the rich man is told. It is not told to satisfy our curiosity about what happens to those who died.

If we are using biblical texts properly we will observe not only the content of the texts, but the purpose for which they were written as well. We’ve emphasized that “a text can never mean what it never meant,” meaning that we must first determine

what the writer meant to say to the original audience. As a corollary, it is also true that the purpose of the text must be observed. There is nothing in the context of Luke 16 that should lead us to believe that Jesus’ purpose, or Luke’s purpose, was to give us a complete picture of the state of the dead.

Having said that, we should also note that there is some information we can derive about that subject from the text. There is no reason to believe that Jesus was telling a fictional story; He gave a true picture of things as they were when He told it.

The question is whether Luke 16 is the final word on what happens to the righteous after they die in the Christian dispensation. When one looks at passages in the NT that deal directly with that subject, he will see an apparent contradiction with the sermons we have heard from Luke 16. The following is my attempt to reconcile these passages and present a unified view of the state of the righteous dead. Here is a summary of the argument:

Luke 16:19-31 presents a picture of the state of the dead under the Mosaic Dispensation. Jesus had not yet died on the cross for the remission of sins, so a waiting place was required. Without the sacrifice of Christ, no soul was worthy to enter into the actual presence of God. After Jesus died, the veil that stood between God and man was torn in two and access into heaven was granted. The faithful were made worthy to enter heaven through the blood of Christ. It was no longer necessary for them to wait in “Abraham’s Bosom.” Nothing stands in the way of those who are “in Christ” any longer. Sins have been taken out of the way by His perfect sacrifice. Hence, the spirits of the righteous dead are presently behold-

ing the face of God and have all the benefits of life in heaven. When the final judgment comes, in some sense the resurrection of the body will occur and they will be given a new, glorious body in which to live eternally. The texts and arguments that follow support this view.

Two Classes of Texts in the New Testament

(1) Prior to the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ.

An intermediate state – Hades

Everyone at death, regardless of their spiritual condition, went to Hades (the place of departed spirits). E.g.'s — Rich Man (Luke 16:23); Jesus (Acts 2:27, quoting Psalm 16). Note that Luke 16 does not say that Lazarus was in Hades; we *infer* that he was. It says the beggar (Lazarus) died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom (v. 22); the Rich Man *died* and was *buried* and he saw Lazarus *afar off*. We also infer that Hades had two compartments (Luke 16 does not use these terms): "Paradise" and "Tartarus." Let's examine each of these terms:

Hades answers to *sheol* of Old Testament (an ambiguous term; can mean "grave," "pit" or great depth opposite to heaven [Psa. 139:8]). In the NT, *Hades* occurs 10 times, only in Matthew, Luke, Acts and Revelation. Note what the NT says about *Hades*.

- Cities were to be "thrust down to" it (Luke 10:15; Mt. 11:23). Jesus said of Himself that He would be in the "heart of the earth" for three days (Mt. 12:40).
- It has "gates" and seems to be naturally opposed to the church (Mt. 16:18).
- Jesus has the "keys" – Rev. 1: 18
- It is related intimately with death (Rev. 1:18; 6:8; 20:13f.).
- The Rich Man was there (Luke 16:23).
- Jesus was there but didn't stay (Lk. 23:43; Acts 2:27, 31).

Here is what scholars have to say:

Hades

H. Bietenhard, in DNTT: "There is no unified picture of an unambiguously formulated doctrine [regarding the ultimate state of the dead], and the power of death must also be seen in the light of the victory of the cross... Hades is the temporary abode of the dead to which they are banished."

Bauer on Hades: "the underworld, as the place of the dead."

Liddell & Scott "god of the underworld. II. later, the

grave, death."

Kittel "a. When the NT refers to Hades, the reference is to the abode of souls loosed from their bodies. b. The NT is also in agreement that Hades lies at the heart of the earth. In contrast to heaven as the highest height it signifies the deepest depth (Mt. 11:23). c. Finally, the NT agrees that the stay in Hades is limited, as may be seen from the sharp distinction between Hades and gehenna ... On the other hand, in another respect we seem to have a double view in the NT. In Acts 2:27, 31 Hades seems to be thought of as a place of assembly for all souls, and in Luke 16:23 (cf. 26) all the dead are pictured as in the underworld, though Hades itself is used only of the place of punishment of the wicked. Yet there are other passages according to which only the souls of the ungodly are in the underworld (I Pet. 3:19), whereas the righteous are in "everlasting habitations" (Luke 16:9), in Paradise (23:43), with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8), united with Christ (Phil. 1:23), in the heavenly Jerusalem (Hb. 12:22), under the heavenly altar (Rev. 6:9, with reference to the souls of the martyrs), and before the throne of God (Rev. 7:9, referring to martyrs and 14:3 to the "unspotted"). To this twofold conception, analogous to that found in Judaism of the NT period... there corresponds the twofold use of Hades in the NT... In virtue of the promise of Jesus His community knows that it is secure from the powers of Hades (Mt. 16:18) because by faith in Him it has access to the kingdom of God (16:19). In particular it knows that its dead are not in Hades, but in the presence of Jesus.

Paradise

Gk. *paradies*, garden, park, paradise; used in the OT in Gen. 2-3 of Eden. In NT, the word occurs only three times:

According to DNTT, Luke 23:43 refers to the at present hidden and intermediate abode of the righteous... the intermediate state thus becomes essentially fellowship with Christ. [The writer goes on to point out that according to the late Jewish writing Test. Lev. 18:10, the Messiah was expected to "open the gates of paradise." E.E. Ellis writes, "Luke declares that in His death and resurrection Jesus opened the gates of Paradise and was exalted there with His body"].

In another occurrence of *paradies*, in II Cor. 12:4. C.K. Barrett comments, "The experience described in our passage may be thought of as an anticipation of the final transference of believers to heaven, or Paradise."

In the final occurrence of the word, in Rev. 2:7, the Spirit promises to the church at Ephesus: "To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life which is in the midst of the Paradise of God." Those who overcome are promised restoration of what Adam lost... [and] access to life in a way Adam never had. According to Rev. 22:1-2, Paradise is in heaven.

Tartarus

Though it is commonly referred to on charts on Luke 16, the word is not found there; it is found one time in the

NT, in II Pet. 2:4. The Greek word *tartaroo* is translated “cast down to hell.”

Bauer: “Tartarus, thought of by the Greeks as a subterranean place lower than Hades where divine punishment was meted out, was so regarded by Jewish apocalyptic as well (Job 41:24); ‘hold captive in Tartarus,’ 2 Pet. 2:4.”

Summary

1. The wicked go into an intermediate state of torments (Tartarus), “reserved unto judgment” (2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6). They will stay there until “Death & Hades are cast into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:14) along with the devil and his angels (Mt. 25:41; Rev. 20:10). This will take place after the second coming of Christ, the general resurrection and final judgment.

2. Prior to the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ, the righteous went to the Hadean world, to a compartment called “Abraham’s Bosom” (Luke 16:22) or “Paradise” (Luke 23:43). Jesus went there between His death and resurrection and took the Thief with Him. But Paradise was not, at least in those passages, the dwelling place of God because He told Mary not to cling to Him, “for *I have not yet ascended to My Father*” (Jn. 20:17).

3. Therefore, before Christ’s death, the righteous went to an intermediate state which was a state of comfort and bliss, but not heaven itself. There (in Hades) they awaited the dedication of heaven (the spiritual “Holy of Holies”) by the sacrificial blood of the perfect Lamb of God, Jesus, their forerunner and High Priest.

(2) After the ascension of Christ, when He took His place at the right hand of God.

Two examples: Stephen and Paul

Stephen. Acts 7:59, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” In v. 55, he saw Jesus at the right hand of God. It’s clear that Stephen expected Jesus to receive his spirit. Was he speaking figuratively? Possible, but doubtful. I think Stephen expected to be with Jesus the moment the stones crushed out his life. Where was Jesus?

Paul. From a common sense, simple reading of the words of the apostle, it does not appear that he conceived of a “waiting place.” He expected to go *directly to heaven* when he died and seems to think of paradise and heaven as the place. Note the following passages.

1. **Phil 1:23** “But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better...”

2. **II Cor 5:6-8** “Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are 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.”

3. **2 Cor 12:1-6** “Boasting is necessary, though it is not profitable; but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a man was caught up to the third heaven. And I know how such a man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows—was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak. On behalf of such a man I will boast; but on my own behalf I will not boast, except in regard to my weaknesses. For if I do wish to boast I will not be foolish, for I will be speaking the truth; but I refrain from this, so that no one will credit me with more than he sees in me or hears from me.”

For several important reasons, which are all based in the significance of the work of Christ, Paradise was located in Hades and served as an intermediate place of comfort for the righteous dead until the resurrection and ascension of Christ. Until then, it was a necessity, after, it was not necessary. We will consider why below.

Christ's Work in the Book of Hebrews

Hebrews is a book about “better” things: a better mediator, a better priesthood, a better sanctuary, a better covenant. The reason things are better under the New Covenant is because sin has been dealt a fatal blow in Christ. Jesus died because of sin and for sin. His resurrection was a victory over sin and death (2:14). The book of Hebrews details all of this for us and implies that heaven has been opened, once and for all, to the righteous—they go directly to the presence of the godhead after death, just as Paul says in Phil. 1:23 and II Cor. 5:8. Hebrews is, of course, referring to our *present* access to God. We have such access by prayer by the authority and in the name of Christ. However, the question is whether we, as those who live, have something more than Christians who have died. The following verses and comments form what we might call a *Christology of Heaven in Hebrews*.

1:3 “...when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high...”

Note where Jesus is and what He did before He went there.

2:9-10 “...that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone...bringing many sons to glory.”

What is “glory”? What does it involve? Heaven?

2:14-15 “...through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is the devil and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.”

Christ defeated the power and effect of death at the cross and released us from the chains of sin and, therefore, the fear of death. If sin is taken out of the way, what prevents us from being in the presence of God?

5:3 “...because of this he (the High Priest) is required as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins...”

Note the limitation of the earthly High Priest. He had sin and could only go into the Holy of Holies with an offering for his own sins first. In other words, he did not enter the Holy of Holies unconditionally.

6:19-20 “This hope we have as an anchor to the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever...”

Note that our hope is personified and “enters” the Pres-

ence behind the veil. The “veil” was the curtain which separated the holy place from the Most Holy Place in the temple into which no one could enter except the High Priest, under severe limitations (Lev. 16:1ff). When Jesus died, the veil was torn in two (Mt. 27:51), perhaps symbolic of the access behind the veil secured by His death for sin. In fact, His body became the “veil” (Hb. 10:20). He was our *forerunner*. A “forerunner” is one who “leads the way” and “goes before.” Jesus, our better and permanent High Priest, ushered the way (“opened the gates”) into heaven itself. Those who through faith have identified with Christ in baptism, rising to walk in “newness of life” and “dead to sin” (Rom. 6:1-7) are now *worthy* to enter heaven. Before Christ paid the price for sin, man could not enter the Presence behind the veil.

7:16, 19 “...according to the power of an endless life...[19] for the law made nothing perfect; on the other hand, there is the bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God.”

Unlike the law, which only convicts man of sin, and does not forgive, Christ came and made us “perfect” (in Him, not in us). We are therefore able to draw near to God. “Draw near” was another way of saying “sacrifice.” When we come to God we bring our living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1-2) and God gives us access, because of our standing which was secured by Christ. Certainly, this is a present blessing; but is that all? Is the access (the “drawing near”) to God terminated or even delayed because of death? Christ destroyed the power of death! We have a better hope, obtained by our perfect High Priest (see 7:26-27).

8:1-2 “...who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected and not man...”

Again note where Jesus is and the work He accomplished. As verse 4 points out, Jesus is a High Priest who serves in heaven itself. Are we going to where He is? (The church is referred to as the “temple of God” in I Cor. 3:16, but this passage probably does not refer to the church, but to heaven. Cf. 9:24).

8:12 “For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.”

The thing that sets the New Covenant apart from the Old is the absolute removal of objective guilt. This was not accomplished at any time under the Old Covenant (10:4); it awaited the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Only through Christ are we made worthy to come into the presence of God. But through Christ, we *are* worthy indeed!

9:8-10 “...that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the First tabernacle was still standing, it was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience...ordinances imposed until the time of reformation.”

How could it be more plain? While the old order was still in force (with the temple and all its articles) the way into the Holiest was not seen (physically or spiritually). When the time of reformation came, those things were done away and the way was clear to enter the “Ho-

liest of All.” The old order had no power to clear the conscience (or the fact) of sin.

9:12, 15 “...but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption... [15] And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the First covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.”

We have something we didn't have before – does it relate only to our lifetime? The righteous who died under the first covenant also have something they didn't have before - what? What is the Holy of Holies a type of? See 9:24.

9:23-28 “Therefore it was necessary for the copies of the things in the heavens to be cleansed with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; nor was it that He would offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place year by year with blood that is not his own. Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment, so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.

Note that the *real thing* is purified with a better sacrifice than “copies”; that Christ went into heaven itself to appear before God before us; that He “put away sin” and died to “bear the sins of many,” opening the door of heaven to us all. For those who are still alive, He will come again bringing salvation with Him.

10:10-14 By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time onward until His enemies be made a footstool for His feet. For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.”

Jesus sacrificed once for sin and then sat down at the right hand of God waiting until the day of final judgment of the devil and his angels. He perfected forever those who are being sanctified (set apart through faith and baptism).

10:19-20 “Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh,”

Jesus consecrated a new and living way, through the veil. Surely we partake of this at death as well as in life!

11:39-40 “These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had

planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.”

They (the faithful under the old covenant) could not be made “perfect” until Christ died for their sins. When He did, they were perfected along with us. Now, all the faithful are “worthy” (in Christ) to enter God's heaven.

12:22-24 “But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.”

Were righteous men made perfect but left in the waiting place? Are our names written in heaven but we do not go there directly after death? Possible, but...?

Summary

While there are many present blessings for the living through Christ's work, His work made a difference for those who died in faith before Him, as well. By taking away sins once and for all, He bathed all who have died in faith in His precious blood – our sins are remembered no more. Before He died, no one at all was worthy to enter heaven; they were still objectively in their sins (Hb. 10:4). But Jesus cured that defect and paid the ultimate entrance price. Upon His death, resurrection and ascension, all of those who died as faithful men and women under the old covenant were led into heaven by Christ Himself. Those who have died in faith subsequent to the cross go directly into the presence of God, worthy now – because of Christ – to see God and live (cf. Ex.33:20; Jn. 1:18; cf. Jn. 1:12). The intermediate state, described in Luke 16, was a necessity until Christ removed the sins of those who were dwelling there, allowing them to enter heaven itself.

Objections Answered

Regarding the use of Hebrews.

Some may feel the passages in Hebrews have nothing to do with where the spirit goes after death. That may be right, but the book is about our access to God through the High Priesthood of Christ. Logically, I have a difficult time seeing how we can argue greater access to God while we live, but not while we die. My simple question is did Christ do anything for the dead, or were they left in the same state, unaffected by His work?

What about Luke 16?

There are several questions we should ask before making Luke 16 the last word on the state of the dead.

It occurred before the cross. If the thief on the cross could be saved without baptism because it happened prior to the death of Christ, then why not apply the same reasoning to this subject, in light of the post-crucifixion passages? I've explained why I felt the "waiting place" in Hades was necessary before Christ died.

Before one confidently asserts that Luke 16 gives a clear explanation of the subject, please note what is *not* mentioned there: "waiting place"; "compartments"; the beggar in Hades; "intermediate place"; "judgment"; "resurrection," "tartarus," "paradise." Some or all of those things may be there, but I will not grant that those who rely totally on this passage have the "hermeneutical high ground." We criticize dispensationalists who do the same thing with Rev. 20:1-4 about the 1,000 reign; they include in their explanation several terms that are not in the text. What gives us the right to do that before we harmonize all of scripture on this subject?

Isn't one in the "Presence of God" even if there is a waiting place? Certainly. But the Bible never says that one is in the presence of God while in Hades, as far as I know. It does say (*after* the cross) that when we die we will be in the presence of God and of the Lord (Phil. 1:23; 2 Cor. 5:8). Is "presence of God" or "at home with God" simply figurative language? The rules of interpretation do not allow us to assume that in such otherwise non-figurative passages.

Ten days after the ascension of Christ, Peter said David ascended not into the heavens (Acts 2:34).

From this, some argue that David is not in heaven at the time Peter spoke, nor is he *now*. In the first place, the point of the statement is that David is not in heaven sitting on a throne and reigning. Further, is Peter talking about David in the present tense, or was he talking about what happened to David at the time he died in about 970 B.C.? Also, was Peter

speaking of the *spirit* of David or his body? Peter was speaking of the body of David and comparing him to Christ, showing that the language concerning his soul not being in Hades and his body not seeing corruption did not apply to him, but to Christ. He reminds them that the body of David was still dead and buried – his body *did* see corruption. He did not ascend to heaven after his death (as did Christ). His listeners could go and look at his grave. Peter wasn't speaking of the spirit of David, and so the objection has no bearing on our view. Even Solomon said, "then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it." (Eccl. 12:7)

If we go to heaven at death, what's the purpose of judgment?

This question is applicable to *either* position; it is clear that those in the intermediate place know their eternal destiny as do those who are in heaven. So, if judgment is to inform of one's final destination, what's the purpose of judgment for the rich man and Lazarus?

Consider the *purpose* of judgment. Only those who are alive at the last judgment, a relatively small number, will have any doubt about their final destination. The judgment is not designed to determine *where* people are headed but to show *why* they are going there, and to vindicate the righteous justice of God. At judgment, "let God be true and every man a liar" (Rom. 3:4).

What is the purpose of the resurrection if we are in heaven already?

Again, this question could be asked of the traditional position. In what state were the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16? We know they were in some kind of spiritual, conscious state. We know from I Corinthians 15 that God intends to give us a glorified body, fashioned like the body of our Lord (I Cor. 15:43). But God's purpose in this has not been revealed. We go to heaven (or in the case of the unrighteous to the place of torment in Hades) in a spiritual state, but not in our final state. We will not get our new body until the second coming of Christ, according to I Cor. 15. Nothing in the Bible implies that we have to be in the new body to be in the presence of God. The purpose of the body is not even disclosed.

What about John 14:1-4, "I will receive you to myself"?

The argument is that Jesus said He was going away and would come again, presumably at the judgment, to collect the faithful. But consider:

Jesus is speaking to His disciples in a personal way, prior to His death, not after His resurrection. "I will come

again” can mean several things: He “came” again at the resurrection, which is the most proximate “coming.” He came at Pentecost and He comes to each believer when they believe in Him (v. 23). He will also come at the final judgment.

When did Jesus “prepare a place” for the disciples? One reasonable way of understanding this passage is to understand that He was going to “prepare a place” through His death (cf. 17:4, regarding His “work”). He will come to us when we die and receive us to Himself at our death. Many scholars do not believe “going” and “coming” is limited to geography but is an eternal reality involving Christ with His people.

Doesn't John 3:13 say that no man has ascended to heaven?

The statement is made prior to the cross, but it doesn't refer to the place of the dead anyway. It's saying that no man has gone into heaven and come back to tell us heavenly things. Only Christ has descended to do that (v. 12).

How do we reconcile I Th. 4:13-18?

Paul is simply telling those who are still alive not to fret over those who are dead. He says they are “sleeping,” and that God will bring with Him those who sleep. It logical, in light of other biblical references, that Paul is saying that those who are dead will be brought to God through Jesus, or even that Jesus will bring them with Him when He comes again (3:13). In light of other passages, it isn't teaching that the dead are only in the grave waiting for the resurrection, nor does it speak absolutely to where the spirit of the dead are.

So What?

Some may ask what difference all this makes. I'm not suggesting that one needs to have a grasp on all these things to get to heaven. Nor will I complain about being in Abraham's Bosom, if I'm wrong. Hardly!

I do think we should attempt to know all that the Bible says on a particular subject and be very careful about making personal judgments about what is important and what is not important. We can't know *everything* which relates to our state after death, but we can know a great deal more, if we'll read a little further than Luke 16 and Hb. 9:27.

These passages are important to the whole, they are not the whole.

The weight of evidence seems to be on the side of the righteous going to directly to heaven. And if I'm right about the impact of the book of Hebrews on this subject, then it helps me have a better appreciation for the work of Christ and the extent of it. Passages such as Hb. 9:15 and Zech. 14:8, which refer to the position of the Old Testament saints at Christ's death, are more meaningful.

Conclusion

Let's remember that the point of all this is to *get there*, whether it is heaven or a waiting place. And remember that Christ could come at any time, rendering this whole discussion somewhat moot. At that time, He will descend from heaven with a shout; the dead in Christ will rise first, then those who are alive will be caught up together with them in the clouds and thus we shall always be with the Lord” (I Thess. 4:13-18). Be ready!

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