

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this teaching series, you will have an opportunity to learn about the practical life of the Christian community. Two teachers will teach from the Bible about the Christian ceremonies. As you listen to this programme, make notes in a notebook or record the programme. Today's teaching is: **THE CHRISTIAN FUNERAL CEREMONY**. We will learn what the Bible teaches about death, the funeral ceremony and the resurrection from the dead.

(S) **POINT 1. THE NATURE OF PHYSICAL DEATH**

First. Death is not "natural", but a "punishment".

The first people, Adam and Eve were *not* created 'mortal'. They were created in the image of God, and this perfect condition seems to exclude decomposition and mortality. Physical death is not *a continuation* of man's original mortal condition, after he failed to rise to the height of immortality by his disobedience. Physical death is the result of the fall into sin, *a fall* from the possibility to continue in immortality to the depth of mortality! In the Bible, physical death is not represented as something *natural* to man, but rather as an expression of *divine anger* (Ps 90:7-11), as a judgement of God (Rom 1:32), a condemnation (Rom 5:16), and a curse (Gal 3:13). If God were only just, he might have *imposed death immediately* after Adam's transgression (Gen 2:17). However, by his common grace to all creation, he *restrained the operation of sin and death*. And by his special grace in Christ *he conquered sin and death* (2 Tim 1:10)! Therefore, physical death will only accomplish its work of terror fully in people who are not saved by Christ (Heb 2:15).

(T) **Second. Death is a separation of the body and the soul.**

What happens to a person's soul after he dies? The Bible teaches that when a person dies, there is a separation of his body and his soul or spirit. Ecclesiastes 12:7 teaches that at death "the dust returns to the ground it came from, and *the spirit* returns to God who gave it". Revelation 6:9 says that "*the souls*" of Christians, who suffered, are in heaven, while Hebrews 12:23 says that "*the spirits*" of righteous men are in heaven.

(S) **Third. Death is a means of sanctification.**

Why do Christians still die? The physical death of believers in Jesus Christ is no longer a punishment for their sins, because Christ's atonement on the cross has completely satisfied God's righteous anger against their sins. Their *sufferings* on earth, of which *physical death* is the culmination, must be regarded as *the means by which God sanctifies* his people. Their sufferings and realisation of their coming death have a beneficial effect on believers. They serve to humble the proud, to mortify carnality, to check worldliness and to foster spiritual-mindedness. According to 1 Peter 4:6,12-13, just as Christ entered his glory by way of his sufferings and death, so Christians enter their eternal state only through suffering and death. According to Hebrews 12:23 and Revelation 21:27, their suffering and death on earth completes the sanctification of the souls of believers so that they become "spirits of just men made perfect". Death is not *the end* for Christians, but *the beginning* of their perfect life! For Christians, "the sting of death" has been removed and death becomes the gateway to heaven (1 Cor 15:55).

(T) **POINT 2. THE INTERMEDIATE STATE BETWEEN DEATH AND RESURRECTION**

First. The state of non-Christians and Christians between death and resurrection.

Where do the souls of non-Christian and Christian go after death? The Bible teaches that at the death of a godless and wicked non-Christian, his soul is separated from his body and immediately enters hell. Luke 16:22-23 teaches that such a person immediately goes to hell, the place of eternal torment. The Bible teaches us little about where the souls of people go who have never heard about Jesus Christ. But in Luke 12:47-48 Jesus teaches that such people will be treated completely fair and just in the Last Judgment. The Bible teaches clearly that at the death of a Christian, his soul is separated from his body and immediately enters the presence of Jesus Christ. Luke 16:22 teaches that the Christian is immediately carried to the side of Abraham by angels.

Luke 23:43 teaches that the repentant robber immediately enters paradise to be with Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:8 teaches that the Christian's absence from the body means being at home with the Lord.

Philippians 1:21 teaches that his departure from earth means being with Christ.

And Hebrews 12:22-24 describes his existence in heaven as coming to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly; to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven; to God, the judge of all men; to Jesus the Mediator of a new covenant; ... and to the spirits of righteous men made perfect.

Finally, Romans 8:35-39 teaches that physical death can never separate the Christian from God or God's love for him!

(S) Second. The condition of Christian souls in heaven.

What do the Christian souls experience and do in heaven? During the interim period between death and resurrection of Christians, their bodies are in the grave, while their souls or spirits are in heaven. Their souls or spirits are very *conscious and active* in heaven. According to Revelation 14:13 and 7:16-17, the souls *rest* from their competition, toil, problems, worries, sickness, suffering, pain, fear, anguish, sin and sorrow they experienced on earth. They will never suffer anymore.

According to John 14:2 and 17:24, they will be in the presence of Christ and see his glory, that is, *behold and experience* his love, mercy, holiness, righteousness, kindness and wisdom.

According to 1 Corinthians 13:9-12, imperfection will have disappeared and they will *know* everything fully.

According to Psalm 16:11, they will be filled with *joy* and eternal pleasures in God's presence.

According to Revelation 4:10-11 and 5:12-14, they will *sing* new songs to God, *praise* and *worship* God.

According to Revelation 7:9-15, they will *serve* God day and night. Like the angels, who also have no bodies, Christians will serve God in a great variety of meaningful work.

According to Revelation 2:26 and 3:21, because they are with Christ, Christians will be involved in everything that Christ is doing, in *ruling* and in *judging* the earth.

(T) Third. The resurrection of the dead.

What happens to Christians after the resurrection of their bodies? At the resurrection, Christians will receive a renewed body! According to Philippians 3:20-21 and 1 Corinthians 15:42-44, the dead bodies of Christians will be transformed so that they will become like Christ's glorious resurrected body! Their bodies will be *incorruptible*, that is, never grow old, sick or weak. Their bodies will be *glorious*, that is, share in the divine characteristics like love, holiness, righteousness, power and wisdom of God. Their bodies will be *immortal*, that is, they will exist forever in a perfect life, in everlasting blessedness and in the presence of God! Finally, their bodies will be *spiritual*, that is, completely renewed and completely governed by the Holy Spirit!

(S) POINT 3. REFUTATION OF THE SECOND CHANCE THEORY

First. The second chance theory.

One. What is the second chance theory? The second chance theory, which is currently taught by many false teachers, is *not* biblical. The second chance theory says that salvation through Jesus Christ is still possible after death. These false teachers believe that everyone who never had a chance to hear the gospel, or never properly considered the claims of Christ, or who died in infancy, will get a second chance to believe in Jesus Christ after death. They say that no one will be condemned to hell without a proper chance to hear the gospel and believe. Therefore, they conclude that the eternal state of man is not irrevocably fixed until the Day of Judgement. The second chance theory is often an excuse not to proclaim the gospel to people and it robs evangelism of its urgency!

Two. On what do these false teachers base their second chance theory? The false teachers base their second chance theory on a human understanding of love and justice. They also refer to verses like John 3:18,36, which according to them teach that a deliberate unbelief is the *only* ground of condemnation. They refer to 1 Peter 3:19 and 4:6, which according to them, say that Christ in the period between his death and resurrection preached to the spirits in the underworld. They also base their theory on passages like 2 Corinthians 5:10 and Revelation 20:11-15, which according to them say that the destinies of people will be determined only at the Final Judgement. The second chance theory is completely unbiblical!

(T) Second. Arguments against the second chance theory.

One. What determines the eternal destiny of people? The eternal destiny of people is determined by things done in the flesh, that is, in this life on earth before death. It is never determined by things that occur in the intermediate stage after death. The eternal destinies of people are dependent on their *relationship to Jesus Christ while they are still here on earth!* Jesus says in John 3:18,36, "Whoever does not believe, *stands condemned already*, because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son". "Whoever rejects the Son *will not see life*, for God's wrath *remains* on him".

In Matthew 7:22-23, 10:32-33 and 25:34-46, Jesus teaches clearly that doing God's will *on earth*, acknowledging Jesus before people *on earth* and doing deeds of kindness to Christ's brothers *on earth* determine the eternal destiny of people!

According to the parable of the talents in Matthew 25, the reward or punishment of each person is determined before he dies and before the Second Coming of Jesus.

2 Corinthians 5:10 says, "We must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, that each may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad". *At the Final Judgement, the eternal destinies of people are not decided, but announced.* The eternal destinies of people are determined by their life while they were still on earth!

Two. Is the state of non-Christians fixed after they die? Yes, the state of unbelievers after death is already a fixed state. Luke 16:19-31 teaches that God punishes godless and wicked people *immediately after death.*

2 Peter 2:9 says, "The Lord holds the unrighteous for the day of judgement, while continuing their punishment". The unrighteous are "*held fast*" or "*preserved* for a definite purpose and for a definite time". After death, their punishment continues and they suffer until the Final Judgement Day. After the Final Judgement Day their suffering is worse. They will suffer the added shame of God pronouncing their punishment *in the presence of all people who ever lived.* They will suffer the agonies of hell not only in their soul, but also in their *body!* They will suffer the agonies of the withdrawal of God's ever present reality from them forever. Jude 7-13 teaches that the blackest darkness "*is continually being reserved forever*" (perfect tense!) for the unrighteous.

(S) Third. Will the gospel still be preached to people after they die?

Definitely not! 1 Peter 3:19 and 4:6 does not teach that people get a second chance after death. These two passages do not teach that the gospel is preached to people in the underworld between their death and resurrection. These two passages speak about different things and may therefore not be used together to construct a second chance theory. 1 Peter 3:18-22 speaks of "the triumphant ascension of Christ into heaven" and 1 Peter 4:6 speaks of "the sanctification of Christians on earth".

Conclusion: There is no evidence in the Bible that people will get a second chance to be saved after death!

(T) POINT 4. THE CHRISTIAN FUNERAL SERVICE

First. The method of the Christian funeral.

How should Christians bury their dead? The Bible does not prescribe *how* Christians should bury their dead. But the Bible clearly teaches *why* there is death in the world, *where* people go after death, and *what will happen* at the resurrection of the bodies and the Final Judgement at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Therefore, not how Christians bury their dead, but what they preach at the funeral service is important! At Christian funeral services, preachers should teach these important Bible truths to the people listening.

(S) Second. The preaching at the Christian funeral service.

What could Christians preach or teach during a funeral service?

One. Christians should preach about the problem of death. Who can solve the problem of death? Science cannot solve the problem of death. No religion or magic can solve the problem of death. The Bible says that *only God* can solve the problem of death. God brought "death" into the universe as a punishment. Because God is holy and righteous, he must punish sin with death. But according to 2 Timothy 1:10, God also brought eternal life and immortality to light. In his great mercy and love for people, God gave himself in Jesus Christ to die on the cross in the place of those who believe (Rom 3:21-26). God solved the problem of both sin and death through the death of his Son, Jesus Christ.

(T) Two. Christians should preach about Christ experiencing the punishment of death in our place. Christ experienced *the punishment of death* in our place. Throughout history people brought animal sacrifices to God. But, the animals were not perfect and also died unwillingly. Therefore these sacrifices could not save people from their sins. However, according to Hebrews 7:26-27, Jesus Christ was both sinless and willingly offered himself to die in our place! He is the only perfect sacrifice for our sins. Romans 3:21-26 and 5:9-11 teaches that the sins of everyone who believes in Jesus Christ are atoned for. The righteous anger and punishment of God against the sins of believers have been removed and they have been justified and reconciled to God. Everyone, who believes in Jesus Christ, will no more experience death as a punishment for sins, but as the beginning of a perfect life with Christ in heaven.

(S) Three. Christians should preach about Christ experiencing the terror of death in our place. Christ experienced *the terror of death* in our place. Acts 2:22-24 teaches that Christ suffered *the agony of death* in our place. Hebrews 2:9

teaches that Christ *tasted death* in our place. He experienced the agony and terror *to be forsaken by God* (Mat 27:46). However, according to Hebrews 2:14-15, everyone who believes in Jesus Christ is set free from the power of death and from the fear of death! Christians, who believe the Bible, will no more experience the agony, bitterness and terror, which death has for all people, because Jesus Christ experienced it in their place!

(T) Four. Christians should preach about the eternal destiny of man. The eternal destiny of man is determined by his relationship to Jesus Christ while he is still living on earth! After death and *before* the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, *there will be no second chance* for people to be saved anymore! *After* the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, *there also will be no second chance* for people to be saved! The suddenness of the Second Coming, the swiftness of the resurrection and the immediate Final Judgement means that there will be no opportunity for conversion anymore.

Matthew 25:31-46 teaches that at the Final Judgement, Jesus Christ will *pronounce the reward or punishment for everyone publicly* in front of all people who have ever lived! Therefore, your relationship to Jesus Christ and how you live on earth for him is absolutely decisive how you will be judged! At his First Coming, Jesus Christ has come to save you! Therefore, before your death and before the Second Coming, it is now still *the time of God's favour* (Lk 4:19)! However, at his Second Coming, Jesus Christ does not come to convert people, but to judge people! Therefore, the preacher should preach the gospel at the funeral service and challenge the still living relatives and friends to accept Jesus Christ as Saviour! 2 Corinthians 6:2 says, "Now is the time of God's favour, now is the day of salvation!" *While you are still alive and before the Second Coming* of Jesus Christ is the time you can still be saved! *Now* is the time you can still be saved! Therefore, if you have not yet received Jesus Christ, you should pray and receive him into your heart and life *now*!

(S) **ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK**

First. Teach people what the Bible teaches about death, resurrection and judgement. Make sure that what you believe is based on the Bible and not on fanciful speculation or false teaching.

Second. See the workbooks "Go and build Christ's Church" and Internet on www.dota.net

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to "Discipleship training on the air".