

LESSON ESSENTIALS

UNDERSTANDING SALVATION

LESSON 10: ETERNITY

Christians have a lot to look forward to, both here on earth and after death. As we look at Scripture in this chapter, you'll find out why Jesus promises you eternal joy.

Heaven and hell are realities. Even if your own salvation is secure, it is important to continue to minister to unbelievers and speak to them about the hope for eternal life found only in Jesus.

While different religions have different views on eternity, Christians believe that we never cease to exist and that we live forever. This lesson will give you a clearer understanding of the afterlife.

REFLECT

One of the dictionary's definitions of eternity is "A state of eternal existence believed in some religions to describe the afterlife". Christians don't believe that we are destroyed or annihilated after we die, but that we live forever.

Every day we experience the beginnings and endings of things. This may be the sunrise or sunset, flowers blooming and falling, new opportunities or new stages of life. We sometimes experience the death of a loved one or a new baby born into the family. Endings can be heart-breaking. Some Christian writers have suggested that we find endings so difficult because our souls are in fact made to experience eternity – life without end. It can be hard to imagine what eternity will be like, but the promise of eternal life is what God gives us in the Bible.

Get into a discussion on eternity with an unbelieving friend, and it could last an eternity! That's because different religions have different ideas about life after death. Dictionaries describe eternity as a state of eternal existence, believed by some religions to describe the afterlife. Christians don't believe that life ends after we die, but that we live forever. In some religions, eternity is defined by the constant cycle of rebirths. There are also other faiths that believe that when a person dies, his spirit inhabits the world of the living, in the form of ancestral spirits or ghosts. And many scientists believe that after we die, we cease to exist. But the Bible tells us that there is life after death. Often the Bible even refers to physical death as 'falling asleep' which we 'wake up' from, such as in Daniel 12:2, "And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt."

When we talk about eternity, we refer to two groups of people. One group believes in Jesus Christ and has accepted Him as their Lord and Saviour. The other does not believe in Jesus and has rejected His gift of salvation.

Eternity will be a wonderful experience for those who know Christ. In His Word, God explains that we will be taken to heaven after we die. In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, the author again calls those who have died physically 'asleep': "But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep...For the Lord himself

will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words.” Be encouraged that there is a glorious home waiting for us with the Lord for eternity!

What will this home be like? The Bible does not tell us specifically, but there are a few hints of the wonderful things that are to come. Isaiah 65 speaks of a place where there is no weeping, distress or pain; where we will work and build and enjoy the fruits of our labour; and where the lion and the lamb will lie down together. God will live with us, as Revelations 21:3-4 says: “And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” Revelation 21 also talks about a beautiful city with streets of gold, where there is no need for light, because God’s glory will be our light. What a wonderful place where we will live forever with God!

We need to keep in mind that we will stand before the judgement seat of Christ to receive His eternal reward. 1 Corinthians 3:11-14 tells us how our service on earth will be reviewed and rewarded. What is wonderful is that because we are forgiven, we will not have to face any kind of condemnation or guilt for past sins (Romans 8:1).

Things won’t be that way for unbelievers. In fact, the parable in Luke describes quite a frightful scene. In this parable, there is a rich man and a poor beggar named Lazarus. While the former enjoyed a comfortable life on earth, Lazarus struggled to survive and hoped that he could eat what fell from the rich man’s table. When they both died, the rich man went to Hades, or Hell, while Lazarus went to paradise. “And in Hades, being in torment, he

Isaiah 65 speaks of a place where there is no weeping, distress or pain; where we will work and build and enjoy the fruits of our labour; and where the lion and the lamb will lie down together. God will live with us.

LOOKING DEEPER

Look into the following verses to learn more about eternity:

John 5:34

Ecclesiastes 3:11

Matthew 24:46

John 14:2-3

lifted up his eyes, and saw Abraham far off, and Lazarus at his side. And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame" (Luke 16:23-24). There are many inferences that we can draw from this passage:

- People don't stop existing when they die.
- Not everyone is saved.
- After passing judgement, there is no second chance for those in hell.
- There is no hope for a change of heart after death.
- The rich man's thirst tells us there is no end to basic human needs in hell.

Hell is a terrible place. Even the rich man couldn't help asking Abraham if Lazarus could go and reach out to his perishing brothers. Abraham dismissed the idea saying that if they didn't listen to the prophets who were alive, why would they listen to Lazarus who was dead? The Bible is clear on the eternal punishment that is in store for those who have rejected the true God. Revelations 20:12-15 says, "And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. 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. 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."

Jesus holds the key to salvation and the ticket to heaven. He is the only way, and without Him we will be condemned forever. Reach out to your friends, family and others you know and tell them about the wonderful things God has prepared for those who believe, that they too may be saved for eternity.

IN REVIEW

- Unlike other religions, Christianity tells us that there is life after death, and that we will live forever either with God or apart from Him.
- The Bible teaches us that those who know Jesus will spend eternity with Him in heaven. This will be a glorious place, without weeping or crying or pain, where we can live in the presence of God!
- On the other hand, unbelievers and sinners are sent to Hell, a place of suffering and pain.
- Believing in the Lord Jesus Christ is the only way we can be saved.

HAVE YOUR SAY

- Does learning about heaven and hell motivate you to share Jesus with someone you haven't before? Think of one person in your life you can share the good news with.
- How can you discuss the subject of eternity with people of other faiths in a manner that conveys a sense of hope and not despair?
- Has the thought of not being in heaven ever crossed your mind? Spend some time reading the Scriptures and in prayer, asking God to make you confident about the day of judgement (1 John 4:13-17).

Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

All other content is © 2019 Trans World Radio Canada, and may be used in any way you like as long as you use it with the purpose of reaching the world for Christ and do not charge for the use of the material. See more license details at www.discipleshipessentials.org/licensing.