

Introduction: Topics for this lesson include (1.) Kingdom of Heaven, (2.) the human soul, (3.) the soul at mortal death, (4.) the soul in the intermediate period?

Salvation and the Kingdom of God: Many people think of salvation in terms of “being saved from the penalty of sin” and “being guaranteed a place in heaven.” Both these things are important and true, but they are not Jesus’ primary emphasis. Jesus emphasized that He brought good news from heaven to the world. The good news is that, through Jesus, the Kingdom of God has come from heaven to earth. Jesus’ instruction for all who wish to become citizens of God’s Kingdom is “follow me.” Just before He returned to the Father in heaven, His command to citizens of the Kingdom was to go into the world and make disciples (people who follow Him). The point is clear. Citizens of God’s Kingdom follow Jesus.

Kingdom of God Defined: What is the Kingdom of God? The Kingdom of God is the domain in which God’s will is obeyed as it is in heaven. On earth today, the Kingdom where God is obeyed (though not perfectly) is in the “hearts” of believers. Luke 17:21b *“for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.”* Ultimately, in the new earth and the new heavens, obedience to God will be universal. Meanwhile, the Kingdom of God grows steadily and ultimately will be all in all.

The salvation earned by Jesus on believer’s behalf is for now and forever. It brings believers immediately into the Kingdom. In the Kingdom we are to follow Jesus. Our sovereign is full of power, love, grace, and truth. To be able to live with Him in eternity, we must be transformed from our natural fallen state to a redeemed state of righteous holiness. Only God can cause that to happen, but He graciously enables us to participate in the process.

Kingdoms of Earth: Earthly kingdoms are domains within which the laws of a country are obeyed. As can be seen from history, earthly kingdoms lack long-term stability. In the end they destroy relationships which sustained them. There are hate-filled people in both high and low places, there is persecution of Christians, injustice, people seeking power through any means, wars and rumors of wars, and on and on. God’s plan, as revealed in the prayer we call the Lord’s prayer, is that, when God’s Kingdom is fully come, everything done on earth will be perfectly according to God’s will, as it is in heaven.

Background Information: There are two different but compatible definitions of a human person. One is based on a definition of human nature, the other is based on definitions of body and soul. The first is particularly useful in discussion of Jesus incarnation as one person with both a divine and a human nature. The second is particularly useful in discussing human persons and what happens at mortal death.

Defining a Nature: All things that exist have essential and non-essential qualities. Consider, a 2-inch diameter iron pipe 3-feet long, painted white. That pipe has the essential qualities of iron plus hollowness and length. Its specific dimensions, weight, and color are nonessentials. Change them and it remains an iron pipe.

The **nature of an iron pipe** is defined as its essential qualities, things that can't be changed without changing it from an iron pipe to something else. An example of an essential change is flattening the pipe, eliminating its hollowness. Without hollowness, it ceases to be an iron pipe and becomes an iron bar.

In general, a **“nature”** is the complete set of essential qualities of a thing, that which makes it what it is.

Human nature: Human nature is the complete set of essential human attributes. Human nature includes body, mind, will, memory, and emotions. Every human person has a human nature, but a human nature is not a person. Human nature doesn't include the “subject” or “I” which directs and controls the “nature.” Jesus the God-man is one person with both a divine nature and a human nature but one source of “I.”

Human Person: A human person is a human nature plus an independent source of “I.” The “I” is the **subject** which lives, thinks, wills, and acts through the nature. The “I” is the owner, possessor, and master of the nature. The source of “I” can be thought of as something like a “mission control center.” A person's “I” directs the use of the attributes of their human nature. A human person is thus a human nature plus the source of their “I.”

Jesus, the God-man is one person with a divine nature and a human nature plus His independent source of “I.” The source of His “I” is the divine “I” that has been His from all eternity. That divine “I” controls both His divine and human natures. He is God-man both because He has a divine and a human nature and because of the divine source of His “I.”

Body and Soul: An alternate way to describe a human person is as the union of a material body with an immaterial soul. All people have both a physical and a non-physical dimension to their lives. The term “body” includes all physical aspects, while “soul” includes all non-physical aspects. The brain and other body parts are physical. The mind, heart, will, spirit, and source of “I” are functional distinctions within the non-material dimension of life.

The precise relationship between soul and body is mysterious (cannot be fully comprehended). We know it is a vital union because the soul is the source of life for the body. When the soul is separated from the body, the body dies and loses the essential qualities of a living body. The soul and its essential qualities continues to live as an immaterial being. The source of “I” is within the soul. The “I,” located in the soul, survives mortal death. The soul remains the same “I” but without a body.

The Impact of God’s Love: *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him”* (John 3:16-17).

Because of God’s love for the world, the second Person of the Trinity willingly became incarnate on earth in the form of a man so that the world might be saved through Him. God’s love changes everything.

The Apostle Paul used the love between a man and a woman in marriage as an analogy of the love between Christ and believers. Andrew Lloyd Weber wrote a song titled “Love Changes Everything” for his musical “Aspects of Love.” The song tells how love between a man and a woman changes them and their world, but Weber’s words could equally apply to the love of God for His people and their love for Him.

Here are a few lines from Weber’s song. *“Love, love changes everything, hands and faces. ... How you live and how you die. ... Love, will turn your world around. And that world will last forever. ... Love will never ever let you be the same.”*

Here is my reinterpretation of those words. God’s love, expressed in saving grace, changes everything, puts a smile on our face and puts our hands to work for the Kingdom. It changes the way we live. In God’s love we live to please Him. It changes the way we die. In God’s love we die knowing we are safe in God’s hands. God’s love for us and our love for God turns our world around, making us safe and secure “in Christ.” Our changed world will last forever. God’s transforming love will never ever let us be the same. All this is both true and profound.

Jesus Proclaims the Kingdom of God: All through His ministry on earth, Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God. As He began His ministry He said, *“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel”* (Mark 1:15). Later He said that it is necessary to do the will of the Father in order to enter the Kingdom. *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven”* (Matthew 7:21). Citizens of the Kingdom obey their sovereign.

Fallen mankind is not attracted to The Kingdom of God. God must intervene enabling people to be disciplined, discerning, and persevering about the Kingdom. *“Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few”* (Matthew 7:13-14).

Job asked, “If a man dies, shall he live again?” (Job 14:14): When Martha’s brother, Lazarus, lay dead, Martha was worried. Jesus spoke to her answering both her question and Job’s question. *“Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?”* (John 11:25-26). That is the vital question. “Do we believe what Jesus said?”

If we do, we affirm that something recognizable as “us” survives mortal death. That something is our soul. Though it is immaterial and cannot be detected by physical senses, the soul is as real as the physical body. At mortal death, the material body and immaterial soul are separated. The body dies and disintegrates. The soul goes to God and continues to live as an immaterial being. For a period after mortal death, the soul exists without a body.

Soul: We know few details about the soul. In addition to being the part of a human person which survives death, the soul also has a vital role in mortal life. The fact that the soul is recognizable as “us” after mortal death allows us to infer a couple of things. (1.) The soul must contain both consciousness and the source of “I.” (2.) Since the body dies when the soul departs, the soul, during mortal life, must contain the source which animates the body. (3.) Without a body, a soul loses its bodily physical senses.

When the body dies, it becomes an **object**, no longer a subject. Chemical laws apply causing the body to disintegrate. A soul without a body is unnatural. God promises He will not leave souls in that state. On the Last Day, each believer’s soul

will be united to a resurrection body. The resurrection body will be recognizable as their own, but greatly enhanced, being like Christ's resurrection body. It will be free from all mortal ills and have abilities the mortal body doesn't have.

Every believer received pardon for their sins and was set on a path to holiness. All are being sanctified through the gracious work of the Holy Spirit, gradually being transformed to be holy. Only the "holy" can live in the presence of the Living God. Every believer's future includes mortal death (unless Christ comes first), plus the completion of the process of sanctification by the Holy Spirit. In the final state of glorification, believers will be holy like God and live eternally with Him.

A Soul Can Exist Without a Body: In the living soul/body union, body and soul are synergistic, each contributes to the capabilities of the other. At mortal death, soul and body are separated. The body ceases to be animated by the soul and becomes a **purely material object** subject to the laws of material decay. The soul continues to exist as a **conscious immaterial subject**.

A person's soul is unobservable except by God. Outward effects of soul activity can be observed. At justification, the Holy Spirit indwells the soul and continues indwelling through mortal life and into eternal life with God.

Redemption of Body and Soul: Christ's grace and power redeem both body and soul. Though separated for a period at mortal death, soul and body will ultimately be reunited on the Last Day. God deems the soul to be of great value. *"And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell"* (Matthew 10:28). *"For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?"* (Matthew 16:26). *"but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* (Romans 5:8)

Redeeming sinners from God's wrath toward sin requires actions beyond human power. Only Christ, the God-man, could do what is necessary to redeem people. No person can redeem their soul or that of anyone else.

To a sinner, the process of receiving salvation is extremely simple, so simple a child can hear the gospel, understand the basic point, believe and be saved. Behind that simplicity is a complex, costly process ordained in eternity and implemented in "time" by God through the incarnate Christ.

Scripture (1 Peter 3:15; 1 Corinthians 3:1-4; Hebrews 5:13-14; etc.) tells believers to grow continuously in understanding what salvation means, thereby

increasing their ability to answer questions for those who ask. Believers are to seek increased wisdom grounded in a firm knowledge of truth (2 Timothy 3:7).

Two additional questions: (1.) “What happens to the soul at mortal death?” (2.) “What happens to the soul in the period between mortal death and resurrection of the body?”

Dr. Von Braun on Life after Death: Speaking about life after death, when he accepted election as President of the National Space Institute in Washington D. C. in 1975, Dr. Werner Von Braun said: *“In our modern world many people seem to feel that science has somehow made such ‘religious ideas’ untimely or old-fashioned. But I think science has a real surprise for the sceptics. Science, for instance, tells us that nothing in nature, not even the tiniest particle, can disappear without trace. Think about that for a moment. Once you do, your thoughts about life will never be the same. Science has found that nothing can disappear without trace. Nature does not know extinction. All it knows is transformation! Now if God applies this fundamental principle to the most minute and insignificant parts of His universe, doesn’t it make sense to assume that he applies it also to the masterpiece of His creation—the human soul? I think it does. And everything science has taught me—and continues to teach me—strengthens my belief in the continuity of our spiritual existence after death. Nothing disappears without trace.”*

What an incredibly profound statement by a brilliant scientist (yes, a true rocket scientist). It is a real game changer observation. Nothing in creation disappears without a trace. A person doesn’t disappear without a trace. The soul lives on after mortal death.

Immortality: The chief reference for the following material is **Immortality** by Loraine Boettner, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 16th printing 1989. My added comments are labeled JLA.

Boettner says, *“In general, the Bible treats the subject of the immortality of the soul in much the same way as it treats the existence of God – such belief is assumed as an undeniable postulate. It takes for granted that the characteristics of our nature are permanent (means our “I” persists, JLA), that we shall continue to possess intelligence, affection, conscience and will. Every passage dealing with the future life assumes that we shall be then as we are now, reverential and social beings, loving God and one another. This necessarily includes recognition, communion with Christ and with the angels and the redeemed.”* (p. 78)

“The Scriptures teach that the state into which the righteous enter at death is one of consciousness, holiness, and happiness, which the resurrection and judgment only augment and make permanent. The mind loses none of its power or knowledge at the death of the body. On the contrary, it enters on a much higher plane of existence. The first and immediate result (of mortal death, JLA) is that the soul, freed from the limitations of earth and cleansed of the last vestiges of sin, finds its mental and spiritual faculties heightened and is more alive and active than it ever was before.” (p. 94) (JLA- I believe the mind is cleansed of all sinful memories. Notice – mind not brain. The brain is in the grave but not the mind.)

JLA: The soul is separated from the body for a period between mortal death and resurrection day. In that interval the soul is in the “intermediate state.”

On resurrection day, every believer’s soul is united to a resurrection body to be theirs forevermore. The intermediate state is over. A state of ultimate bliss has begun.

Biblical descriptions of the resurrected Christ gives some notion of life in a resurrection body. The Bible also gives important but limited information on the intermediate state. In the disembodied intermediate state, souls are in the presence of and recognize our triune God, the angels, and saints who have gone before us.

Among other places, this is seen in the Revelation description of souls with God under the altar, and in the story of the rich man and Lazarus. From these and other places it is clear that disembodied souls can recognize and communicate.

In the intermediate state without a body, a person has no physical sense capabilities like those used in mortal life. We don’t know what mechanisms permit recognition and communication, but there are sufficient biblical comments to assure we will in some manner recognize and communicate.

Limitations in the Intermediate State: Boettner: *“...the intermediate state, while a state of freedom from sin and pain and a time of great personal advancement, is, nevertheless, in other respects a state of imperfection (or incompleteness, JLA). This (incompleteness, JLA) consists, first of all, in that the spirit (or soul, JLA) is without a body, which for the human species is an abnormal condition.*

The body, with its organs of sense, is the instrument through which we contact with the physical world. As long as the disembodied state continues the soul has, so far as we know, no instrument by which it can make contact with the physical world or communicate with individuals here.

The (incompleteness of the intermediate state) consists further in the fact that not at death ... is the promised reward given to the Lord's people. It is not the death of the believer, but the second coming of Christ, that is set forth as the time for the distribution of rewards for the labors and self-denials of this life. ... The blessings received in the intermediate state, great as they may be, are to be regarded only as an earnest and foretaste of the good things to come." (p. 95)

"The life of man, thus falls not into two stages, as is so often assumed, but into three. First, there is the stage from birth until death, which is life in the present world and in the natural body; second, life between death and the resurrection, in the intermediate state, which is life without the body; and, third, life in the resurrection body, which is the final and eternal state."(p. 96).

What's Next? The final state of glorification and eternal life.