

## How Can We Know There Is Life After Death?

I'm in Christian ministry, so perhaps you imagine me saying the most important question of all is whether there is a God or who is Jesus. Those are very important questions, but at least from one perspective they might not be at the very top of the list. For example, let's suppose there is a God, but that God only created the world for temporary creatures. We are here today, gone tomorrow, for nothing more than his amusement. If this were the case, it might be important to ask God for help in this life, but in the end it wouldn't really matter much since the grave would be as far as any of us would get. Or let's suppose Jesus came to die for our sins, but all that did was provide us forgiveness in this life. As in the other scenario, his forgiveness might make us feel less guilty for the few years we are on Earth, but in the end it wouldn't really mean anything. Do you see, then, that whether there is life after death really is an all-important question?

This last week I moderated a discussion among people of all different faiths. A Jewish man posed the question, "How can we know if there is life after death?" Before we had gathered, he told me he really wanted to talk about this question because he said it's a really big question. And I couldn't agree with him more. It is a really big question. But how do we answer it? How can we know if there is life after death or not?

I have to tell you I am rather pragmatic when it comes to a question like this. Some might say you just have to have faith that life after death exists. I don't think faith is unimportant, but I don't think faith makes something exist. If there is life after death, it will not be our faith that makes it happen. It either is or it isn't.

In my pragmatic approach, it seems the only way we can garner any kind of confidence in the matter is to get the inside scoop from a trusted source who has been there before. You gain confidence about things in this manner all the time. Your good friends travel to Costa Rica. They stay in a fine little resort with all kinds of super amenities. You have never been there, but nonetheless you confidently book a trip there yourself after hearing about their stay. I tend to think our conclusion regarding the afterlife ought to come about in the same way. We need to talk to trusted people who have been to the other side. But where do we find that?

Some look to what has become known as near death experiences. Perhaps you have read of some. A person seems to die. His heart has stopped to beat and there is no brain activity. Eyes are shut and there is no sign any of his senses are working. And yet some time later, he awakens and tells stories of what is beyond. Those who have had these experiences sometimes speak of seeing a bright light, feeling a certain calmness, or even talking to people who have already died. There have been too many of these accounts to ignore them, but frankly I don't know what to do with them. First, they often conflict in their description of the afterlife and, secondly, could not a near death experience be just that—something that is only experienced when one is near death, but has yet to die?

I speak with people of all different kinds of religious backgrounds. One of the most interesting things is that nearly everyone respects Jesus regardless of whether they are Muslim or Buddhist or Mormon. They all think that Jesus was a good guy and worthy of following. When I read the most thorough biographies we have of Jesus written by his followers, I see that he was a good guy too. He was always looking out for the little person. He was always telling it like it is, whether it was the popular thing to say or not. If Jesus would have told me of a little shack on the other side of the Sea of Galilee where I could pick up a good fish sandwich for lunch, I would have believed him.

But it seems to me Jesus gives us reason to believe him about a lot more than a fish sandwich. I like the occasion when some men brought a crippled man to Jesus. They actually lowered him through a roof because they couldn't get in the crowded front door. Everyone knew what they wanted. They wanted their friend to be healed. Jesus does something curious though. He says, "Your sins are forgiven." Your sins are forgiven? What is that all about? I mean I'm sure the guy would like his sins forgiven, but let's get down to business Jesus: this guy came to walk not to be forgiven. Besides isn't forgiveness of sins something only God can do?

So what does Jesus do? He says this: "So that you know that the Son of Man (a name he used for God and applied to himself) has the authority to forgive sins, pick up your mat and walk." And lo and behold the man gets up and walks. Jesus, in essence, said, "I know you can't measure whether I've forgiven sins or not, since that it is part of the unseen world, but so that you know what I am talking about, I'll do something in the seen world. I'll make this man walk."

Now, it would be one thing if this was the only time something like this happened with Jesus. But according to the biographical accounts, it happened all the time. Jesus was always doing things that confirmed there is another world than the one we live in and that he knows all about it.

Just before Jesus died, he spoke to his closest followers. He told them he was about to die at the hands of his enemies, and understandably they were quite concerned. It's at that point when he says, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am." (John 14:1-4)

Isn't that interesting? Jesus says he knows something about the afterlife. He says he knows all about it. He says he plans for his followers to be with him there. Now, if Joe Schmuck on the side of the road told me this, I would laugh and move on. But this is Jesus speaking. This is someone who did all kinds of things (including coming back to life himself) to show he is trustworthy on these otherworldly matters.

I spoke earlier of friends suggesting a resort in Costa Rica. I don't think it would be unreasonable to believe them and book a ticket. Similarly, it does not seem unreasonable to believe Jesus when he speaks of a life after this one. He proved, at least to me, that he is worthy of my trust. How can we know there is life after death? For me, the answer is because Jesus told us so.

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