

WHAT JESUS TAUGHT ABOUT THE SPIRIT OF MAN

(Taken and adapted from 'The Red Bits – A Study Guide' by Michael Button)

INTRODUCTION

Western society is predominately materialistic in outlook: beyond that which has a physical existence there is nothing other than mental and abstract thought. The concept of a spiritual realm, or realms, is foreign to the western mind. It is left in the main to religious faiths to recognise the spiritual dimensions to life and existence. However, who can give us accurate information about spiritual realms? Christians believe there is only one reliable source for such information – one who came from the spiritual world and took on physical existence – the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. In this and the following two Studies we shall be looking at what Jesus taught about spiritual realms and spiritual beings. We shall conclude with what He told us of things that are still to come, of His promised return and what lies beyond for those who are faithful to Him.

(Note: This Study is longer than usual and the next one shorter, but there was no obvious way to split this Study to combine part of it with the next one (SS002-20). Students will need to decide for themselves how to spread the lessons.)

A. THE SPIRIT OF MAN

Before we go on to talk about 'other-worldly' spiritual beings, it is important to establish that we human beings are ourselves spiritual beings. Understandably, we think of ourselves as physical beings, for we are acutely conscious of our physical bodies. But in a sense, our bodies are merely vessels through which we can interact with the physical world. The Bible tells us there are actually three parts to a human being: spirit, soul and body (*read* I Thess 5:23).^{*} The theologians call this the *tripart* nature of man (Latin for three parts). The three parts maybe described as follows:

<i>Part of man</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Relates to</i>
Body (Gk: <i>soma</i>)	Physical, biological life.	The material world
Soul (Gk <i>psyche</i>)	The life-principle; the psychological realm; the conscious life of mind, will and emotions.	Oneself – conscious of the body and of the spirit; and with the minds of fellow humans.
Spirit (Gk: <i>pneuma</i>)	The spiritual life, 'breathed-in' by God (see Gen 2:7).	God & the spiritual world

With this in mind, let us now turn to what Jesus said about the spirit of man.

1. **The spirit must be reborn** (*read* John 3:3-6). Because of his sinful state, man cannot interact with God at the spiritual level; his spirit is effectively dead to the things of God. However, at the moment a sinner puts his trust In Jesus for salvation his spirit has *passed from death to life*¹

^{*} The distinction between soul and spirit is unclear and some Christians consider them to be the same thing, thus believing that man consists of just two parts: body and soul/spirit. and he becomes alive to the Holy Spirit and the spiritual Kingdom of God

¹ John 5:24

2. **It is the spirit within us that truly worships God** (read John 4:24). Since God is Spirit, our awareness of Him and communication with Him must be by the spirit. It is possible to give a semblance of worship from the soul, but this is just on the mind-level and cannot involve the true relational aspect that is vital to true worship. The Greek word for 'worship' (*proskuneo*) is derived from the word to 'kiss,' which gives an indication of the strength of relationship involved.

There are two other references of Jesus to the human spirit: a mention of those who are "*poor in spirit*"² and of the tired disciples whose *spirits* were willing but whose flesh was weak,³ but we must not read too much into these statements regarding the eternal spirit that is the fundamental nature of man.

Activity 1: When we talk about *the fundamental nature of man* we mean:

- (a) That man is a physical being.
- (b) That man has a soul.
- (c) That man is basically spiritual.
- (d) That man is fundamentally a sinner.

B. OUR FUTURE STATE

We finished the last section with a reference to man's *eternal spirit*. This means that the life given to every man and woman is not designed to come to an end. The body dies and decays but the spirit lives on.

Jesus did not give us a great deal of detail about life after physical death, but He told us enough to convince us that there is such a continuance of life, both for believers and unbelievers, and that what we do in this life determines what will happen to us eternally in the future life. Much of His teaching on the subject is covered in parables. We shall read a few of these and see what emerges:

1. **Separation at death or at the Second Coming of Jesus** (read Matt 13:24-30, 36-43 and Matt 13:47-50). These are longer readings than is usual in these Studies but it is important to see the whole picture). In these parables we see a clear demarcation between what happens to the righteous (or *just*) and what happens to the wicked. We know from other Scriptures that the *righteous* are those who have been forgiven and declared righteous by God, for no one is righteous by his or her own merit.⁴ Since this declaration of righteousness is given for faith in Christ, the demarcation can be said to be between those who are believers in Christ and those who are not.

2. **Judgment.** A judgment has already taken place, with the separation between the righteous and the unrighteous (the believer and the unbeliever). The righteous will not have to face a judgment that determines their destination, for this is now assured (read John 5:24-27). However, there is a further judgment for believers as they come before the Lord to receive rewards for what they have done in this life.

Activity 2: Read the following passages and, where mentioned, indicate what rewards are promised and for what they are awarded:

² Matt 5:3.

³ Matt 26:41.

⁴ Rom 10:3.

	<i>Passage</i>	<i>Reward</i>	<i>Awarded for</i>
(a)	Matt 5:11-12	(not stated)	
(b)	Matt 10:42	(not stated)	
(c)	Matt 25:34-40		
(d)	Luke 6:35	(not stated)	
(e)	Luke 14:12-14		
(f)	Luke 19:12-17		

3. **The Rule of Jesus on earth.** We learn about the Millennium – the 1,000-year rule of Jesus on earth – from other Scriptures. Jesus does not speak about it directly, but He probably refers to it when speaking about Satan being cast out (*read* John 12:31).*

4. **Hades.** This basically means the place of the dead. It is a holding place for the dead until they are risen to face the final judgment.⁵ The translators of the Authorised Version of the Bible replaced the word *hades* with *hell*. (*read* Matt 11:23).

5. **Hell.** Jesus refers to the final place of the unrighteous as hell, which is an English contraction of the Hebrew word used by Jesus – *Gehenna*. This was the name given to the Valley of Hinnom, just outside Jerusalem, in which children had been burnt as sacrifices to the god Molech in times past⁶ and which in the time of Jesus was used for burning the city's rubbish. The sight of an unending fire, to which unwanted rubbish was committed, is a fitting picture of the fate of being cast out of God's presence awaiting those who reject, not only God's will, but also His pardon. Though there is no need to take this picture literally, the reality behind the picture of suffering unending fire is serious enough to warrant Jesus giving more warnings about hell than promises of Heaven. Herbert Lockyer writes: "While some of His descriptions of the place of final punishment may be figurative, yet they indicate a dreadful reality (of) utter hopeless ruin"⁷.

We shall investigate what Jesus taught about hell in our next Activity. You will not find these verses enjoyable reading but remember they are words of Jesus Himself. He saw fit to give us warning of the consequences of rejecting Him and in particular of rejecting the death He suffered on our behalf. They will remind us of what He has saved us from. After doing this exercise, why not spend a few moments giving thanks to Jesus for what He did to save us from such an awful fate, which is the inevitable outcome of sin.

Activity 3: Read the following passages and write down in your own words the suffering that is described of a soul that is in hell.

* Not all Christians believe in a literal, future Millennium. Since this is a study of the teachings of Jesus, Who barely mentions the subject, this is not the place to discuss the complex arguments involved.

⁵ Rev 20:13-14.

⁶ Jer 7:31,

⁷ Herbert Lockyer, *What Jesus Taught About ...*, Vol 5, page 76^b.

(There is one line for each of the sufferings mentioned)

- (a) Matt 7:19 _____
- (b) Matt 16:26 _____
- (c) Matt 25:46 _____
- (d) Matt 8:12, 22:13 _____
- (e) Mark 9:46 _____
- (f) Mark 3:29 _____
- (g) Luke 16:19-24 _____
- (h) Luke 16:26 (but read 25-31) _____

It is the suffering described in this last passage (the answer is *eternal separation*) that is likely to cause the greatest torment. To be eternally separated from God and from all that is good, with the knowledge of what could have been, can result only in the torment of eternal regret. Don't go there!

6. **Heaven.** Speaking to His disciples at the Last Supper, Jesus broke the news of His imminent departure but explained that He was going to prepare a place for them in His Father's House (*read* John 14:1-6). The beginning of the Lord's Prayer reminds us that God our Father lives in Heaven.⁸ Jesus prayed that those who are His will be with Him in Heaven (*read* John 17:24). The final place of the righteous is therefore Heaven (remember this is a righteousness that is imputed to believers by God).

In utter contrast to the torments of hell, Heaven is a place of eternal blessing.

Activity 4: Read the following passages and write down in your own words the blessings of being in Heaven.

- (a) Matt 5:12 _____
- (b) Matt 6:20 _____
- (c) Luke 10:20 _____
- (d) Luke 15:7, 1 _____
- (e) John 17:24 with Psalm 16:11 _____
- (f) Luke 19:1 _____
- (g) Luke 18:29-30 _____
- (h) John 14:2 _____

We learn more about Heaven from the vision of John recorded in the Book of Revelation than we do from the lips of Jesus. Perhaps we might allow ourselves a slight departure from the Teaching of Jesus at this point, to gain a fuller account of the blessings of Heaven. So continuing the exercise

⁸ Matt 6:9.

(There is one line for each of the blessings mentioned)

(i) Rev 7:16-17 _____

(j) Rev 21:4 _____

(k) Rev 21:27 _____

(l) Rev 22:3 _____

(m) Rev 22:5 _____

(n) Rev 22:14 _____

Jesus told the thief who turned to Him in faith when dying on a cross beside Him, that he would go to be with Him in Paradise (*read* Luke 23:39-43). Though Paradise is not the final abode of the believer, it is a place to be desired. *Paradise* comes from a Persian word meaning 'a walled park or garden,' especially that of a king. It conjures up a picture of walking with the Lord in a beautiful garden, such as Adam and Eve enjoyed in Eden before the Fall.