

Preaching to the Dead (Postmortem Evangelism)

written by Alfred Persson | April 9, 2022



Postmortem Evangelism: Billions died without Christ. Has death separated them from the love of God?

“No”, says Paul the apostle:

For I am persuaded that neither death nor life... shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8:38-39 NKJ)

The Gospel must be preached to the dead because God “desires all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4). What is that truth? Jesus is the only way to God (Jn. 14:6), the “only name” under heaven whereby men can be saved (Ac. 4:12). Therefore, the divine invitation to choose God’s love (Josh. 24:15) must be preached to the

billions who died without Christ, lest God's desire all men be saved have no opportunity. ***Postmortem Evangelism*** must exist lest Death separate billions from God's love.

Moreover, God cannot judge the world for rejecting Christ (John 3:18, 36. Matthew 10:32-33. Mark 16:15,16. Romans 10:9-12. Ephesians 4:18. 2 Peter 2:3, 4. 1 John 4:3) if they never heard about Christ. Then they must go free, for God is Just. Therefore, it logically follows all must hear the Gospel of Christ, if not in this life then in the next.

Therefore, it is written:

For this reason the gospel was preached also to those who are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit. (1 Pet. 4:6 NKJ)

Christ and His apostles taught *Postmortem Evangelism*:

24 "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.

25 "Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear (ἀκούσαντες) will live. (Jn. 5:24-25 NKJ)

He who hears and believes—lives (John 5:24). In John 5:25 "hearing" occurs twice, audible hearing then "the second implies audible hearing and responding."- Trail, R. (2013). *An Exegetical Summary of John 1–9* (p. 235). Dallas, TX: SIL International.

"Now is" Jesus' time, when those listening to Him could be spiritually born again, but they wouldn't rise physically out of the graves until the Resurrection in the end time. So John 5:24-25 applies to all living before the Resurrection, beginning with Christ's audience. Therefore, the "heeding/obeying" action (aorist participle) took place when they heard while living.

That is a different time than John 5:28-29. The dead (in the grave) hear His voice, and all "doing" (ποιήσαντες, aorist active)" good [living according to God in the Spirit"] will rise unto resurrection of life; and they "continuing (πράξαντες aorist active)" in evil [rejecting God's offer of salvation] rise unto a resurrection of damnation. The "doing" and "continuing" are active until the resurrection:

28 Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice,

29 And shall come forth; they that have done (ποιήσαντες, aorist active) good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done (πράξαντες aorist active) evil, unto the resurrection of damnation. (Jn. 5:28-29 KJV)

Some object the dead cannot “do good”, but “doing (4160 ποιέω poieo) good (18 ἀγαθός agathos)” is a moral choice the dead can make (Luke 16:19-31).

Choosing to shrink away from the light results in condemnation for practicing evil:

19 “And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

20 “For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. (Jn. 3:19-20 NKJ)

Among those evangelized postmortem are the Elect (who died unbelievers), the rest are “Undetermined” (salvation is theirs to accept or reject if they did not commit eternal sins). Their bodies are “in the graves”, they are “the dead in “hades”.

The Elect who die believing in Christ in this life (John 5:24-25) are saved by grace through faith” (John 5:24-25; Eph. 2:5-9). Christ will bring them “with Him” (1Th. 4:13) at His second coming (1Th. 4:15-17. 1Cor. 15:51-54), and they reign with Christ as His Kings and Priests, participating in the “first resurrection” (Rev. 1:6; 20:6).

The Elect who died unbelieving must pay for their sins in Hades just like the “non-elect.” God does not show partiality. They are among the dead who rise in the Resurrection at the Great White Throne Judgment after the 1,000-year reign of Christ (Rev. 20:4-6, 11-15).

Paul referred to these Elect specifically when he said “all Israel” will be saved, even though they had died enemies of the gospel of Christ:

1 I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.

2 God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew.

...

26 And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: “The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob;

27 For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins.”

28 Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers.

29 For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

30 For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience,

31 even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy.

32 For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all.

33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!

34 “For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His

counselor?"

35 "Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him?"

36 For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.

Judgment Day occurs after death and the resurrection, when Christ appears the second time to judge the living and the dead:

*And as **it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment**: So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look (553 ἀπεκδέχομαι apekdechomai) for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation. (Heb. 9:27-28 KJV)*

"Judgment" occurs on the Day of Christ (Acts 17:31. 2Tim. 1:12; 4:8. 1Jn. 4:17. 1Cor. 5:5. Rev. 20:11-15). Those in Hades who "live according to the spirit" "eagerly wait" (553 ἀπεκδέχομαι apekdechomai) for His coming "unto salvation" (1 Cor. 5:5. Jn. 5:28-29. 1Pet. 4:6. Rev. 20:13-15). Therefore, this text implies **postmortem evangelism** as these "eagerly wait" for Christ while physically dead. Had they been saved in this life, they wouldn't be judged (John 5:25); these are saved on Judgment Day, that is why they eagerly wait.

The plain reading of Peter teaches postmortem evangelization:

Preaching to the Dead

5 Who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead.

6 For for this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit. (1 Pet. 4:5-6 KJV)

The adjoining "the dead" (1 Peter 4:5-6) can't have different meanings, the first "the living and dead" of the entire earth; the second only "the spiritually dead" Peter and church preached to; because "the dead" in v. 6 is linked to its predecessor in v. 5. "For this [same] cause was the gospel preached ALSO to them that are dead".

A paraphrase emphasizing Peter's point:

5 The [mockers 1 Pet. 4:4] will give an account for their rejection of the gospel to God who is ready to judge the living and the dead of mankind.

6. For this reason the gospel was preached ALSO to the dead [who never heard the gospel], so all are judged equally as men in the flesh [who died unbelieving], but [then repent and choose to] live according to God's gospel in the Spirit.

All who die without Christ are judged according to the Gospel of God as

unsaved men in the flesh (1 Pet. 4:6), they go to Hell (Lk. 16:23; Jn. 5:28-29; Rev. 20:13). In Hell the unsaved can repent and believe the Gospel and then live according to God in the Spirit (1 Pt. 4:6; 1 Cor. 5:5) eagerly waiting for Judgment Day (Heb. 9:27-28; Zech. 9:11). Their torment purges away both self-deception and bondage to sin so free will is absolutely free. Torment ends when the free will choice is made to “live according to God in the Spirit”. Those rejecting Christ’s ransom continue in torment keeping open their opportunity to repent before Judgement Day, and have their names written among the living in the Book of Life (Rev. 20:13-15; Ps. 69:28; 1 Cor. 5:5).

The preaching and torment in Hades is a function of God’s perseverance, His Love:

For God is resolute, never giving up on getting the Word out. In this world God will give us the power to spread the gospel far and wide. But the Word will also be declared to those we can’t reach, even if it takes an eternity. I am convinced the poet Francis Thompson had it right- Christ is the “Hound of Heaven,” pursuing us to the end.-Gabriel Fackre in What About Those Who Have Never Heard?: Three Views on the Destiny of the Unevangelized (p. 73), Kindle Edition.

God goes the extra mile, because He truly desires all to come to repentance and be saved. The Elect are not permitted to remain in disbelief and rebellion, they will be brought to their senses by purging fire of God’s inspection.

If the “undetermined” have not committed eternal sins like accepting the mark of the Beast (Rev. 14:11), blaspheming the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:31-32), stumbling one of God’s children (Mark 9:42-48), torment like fire will remove all self-deception. They will know the consequences of continued willful persistence in evil. They would be saved if they choose to repent and believe in Jesus.

However, if they would repent, then God would have elected them unto salvation with the Elect.

They have absolute Free Will, and they will choose evil. They are children of the Devil. The torments of hell will not sway those determined to love evil. Evil people, children of the devil WILL NOT repent and live in righteousness with a Holy God. It will be their own free will choice they are lost forever, despite God’s best efforts to save them.

What about that scripture that says God is the Potter who forms us and no one has resisted His will? (Rom. 9:19-23)

*13 As it is written, “Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.”
14 What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! (Rom. 9:13-14 NKJ)*

Unfortunately, Paul only affirms there is no unrighteousness with God (Rom. 9:14), he assumed readers will deduce it from Pharaoh's example. But many have not, they missed the elegant fact God never subverted Pharaoh's free will even though God gets the "credit" for raising him up to accomplish His will.

God hardened Pharaoh's heart (Ex. 7:3) by permitting Satan work deceiving wonders (Ex. 7:11-13) that strengthened Pharaoh's free will choice to resist God. No "hardening energy" went from God to Pharaoh to make him choose evil. That was entirely Pharaoh's choice, but orchestrated events led to Pharaoh being ruler over God's people and his choice to resist God be actualized. This tension between God's working out His will in His creation as He decides, and not causing the choice to do evil, is clear in the following verses:

15 If any nation comes to fight you, it is not because I sent them. Whoever attacks you will go down in defeat.

16 "I have created the blacksmith who fans the coals beneath the forge and makes the weapons of destruction. And I have created the armies that destroy. (Isa. 54:15-16 NLT)

The non-Elect are given every opportunity to choose eternal life with God in Holiness, but they will not. They prefer evil. It would be an evil act of tyranny God force them to choose light over darkness.

God's gift of free will is just as irrevocable (Rom. 11:29) as His Election.

It is for the Elect's sake God permits these vessels of wrath continue to the end (Rom. 9:22-23). Analogous to the Millennial Kingdom permitting the unsaved survivors of Armageddon enter the Kingdom, only to reject it after a thousand years of utopia (Rev. 20:7-9). They desire evil, period. But if God didn't give them every opportunity to repent, the Elect would question for all eternity if God might have saved some. Therefore, it is for our sake God endures them (Rom. 8:28), He already knew before the foundation of the world who were His (Eph. 1:4), and who were not.

*Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You, **For Your judgments have been manifested.**" (Rev. 15:4 NKJ)*

Other texts that imply postmortem evangelization

His spirit many be saved

Paul says the "spirit may be saved" after the "destruction of the flesh" "in the day of the Lord Jesus", i.e., on Judgment Day. That locates the saving event after he died:

5 To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. (1 Cor. 5:5)

Preached to the spirits in prison

We know the “spirits in prison” were saved when Christ preached to them because they are a “like figure” “antitype” to the Church. Just as the Church is saved by the Gospel when it gives the “answer of a good conscience toward God” through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, so were the “spirits in prison” Christ preached to after His crucifixion.

If the “spirits in prison” were not saved, then neither was the church as they are a “like figure” “antitype” to it:

18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit,
19 by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison,
20 who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water.
21 There is also an antitype which now saves us— baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, (1 Pet. 3:18-21 NKJ)

Some interpret Christ proclaimed doom to these spirits, but they never explain why doomed spirits in prison wouldn’t know they were doomed without Christ preaching to them.

Therefore, it is possible to repent in Hades and live according to God in the spirit. *These spirits in prison illustrate postmortem evangelism* perfectly.

They are a “special case” which is why they are in a special place and Christ makes a special trip just to them. These are the hybrid human-angel “men of renown” who refused to believe God would forgive their “Frankenstein hybrid nature” when Noah preached, and the died in the flood.

Other relevant scriptures

Jonah could not liken his experience to being saved from Hades if he didn’t believe it happens:

2 And said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice.
...
6 I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever: yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption,
0 LORD my God. (Jon. 2:2-6 KJV)

The following texts either imply or poetically use the idea of salvation from hell sometimes translated as “the grave”;

Deut. 32:39. 1Sam. 2:4-10; 22:5-7. 2Kgs. 5:7. Job 14:13-22; 19:25-27. Ps. 9:13; 16:10-11; 24:7-10; 30:3; 49:15; 56:14; 71:19-24; 73:23-28; 86:13; 88:1-18; 107:10-15; 116:3-9; 118:17-18; 142:1-7. Pr. 5:22. Isa. 4:4; 14:9-10; 24:22; 26:19-21; 38:17. Lam. 3:25. Ez. 31:16-18. Dan. 12:2. Hos. 13:14; Jon. 2:2-9; Mic. 7:7-9; Zec. 9:11; Rom. 4:17. 2Cor. 1:9.

For great is thy mercy toward me: and thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell. (Psa 86:13 KJV)

I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction: repentance shall be hid from mine eyes. (Hosea 13:14 KJV)

*As for thee also, **by the blood of thy covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water.** (Zec. 9:11 KJV)*

Christ's appearance in the “Galilee of the nations” (=unsaved pagans) **is like preaching in the abode of the dead the “Shadow of Death”** (Job 10:21-22; 38:17) alluding to deliverance from death (cf. “gates of hell” Job 38:7, 17. Isa. 38:10 = “gates of bronze”, bars of iron Ps. 107:10-16) by the preaching of Christ:

*15 Land of Zebulun, and land of Naphtali, the lake-way across the Jordan,—Galilee of the nations,
16 The people that was sitting in darkness, a great light, beheld,—and, on them who were sitting in land and shade of death, Light rose on them.
17 From that time, began Jesus to be making proclamation, and saying,—Repent ye, for the kingdom of the heavens hath drawn near. (Matt. 4:15-17 ROT)*

Some Elect of Israel die enemies of the Gospel (Rom. 11:28) and go to hell for failing to believe in Jesus (Ac. 4:12. Mk. 16:16. Jn. 3:18; 14:6). They remain in Hades until their Deliverer comes forth from Zion, at His Second coming (Rom. 11:26-32).

Those who lived according to God in the Spirit confessing Christ as LORD in Hades are now eagerly looking for His coming:

*27 And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment,
28 so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those **who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.** (Heb. 9:27-28 NKJ)*

All Israel will be saved

26 And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: “The Deliverer

will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob;
27 For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins.”
28 Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning
the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers.
29 For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. (Rom. 11:26-29
NKJ)

Note that Paul cites as a warrant for all this biblical passages in which God promises to “banish ungodliness from Jacob” and “take away their sins” (Isa. 59:20 and Isa. 27:9, cited in Rom. 11:26-27). What is Jacob’s sin at the present moment, according to Paul? Disobedience and lack of belief in Jesus. Since Paul obviously knows of unbelieving Jews and Gentiles who have died, he can only have in mind here some type of posthumous change of heart and salvation for the “fullness of the Gentiles” and all Israel.” It is possible that the “fullness of the Gentiles” means only the “full number” of the Gentiles, and not all of them. But a posthumous salvation is still clearly in view with regard to unbelieving Jews. and Paul does assert that God will show mercy to “all” (Rom. 11:32).-Jeffrey A. Trumbower. Rescue for the Dead: The Posthumous Salvation of Non-Christians in Early Christianity (Oxford Studies in Historical Theology) (Kindle Locations 684-689). Kindle Edition.

“Not written” implies some “were written”

13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.

14 And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

15 And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire. (Rev. 20:13-15 KJV)

Only those “not found written in the book of life” are cast into the lake of fire after rising from Hades, which implies “some were found written in the book”. If they were saved before physical death, they already passed from death into life before Judgment Day (John 5:24-25) and wouldn’t be in Hades.

James L Boyer classifies “if anyone” (ei tis) a “first class conditional” and says:

(“if this”, then that is true) which may imply nothing beyond the logical connection.-“First Class Conditions: What Do They Mean,” Grace Theological Journal, Spring 1981.

However, John is observing and states factually what happened. That requires a reality beyond a logical connection.

I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction: repentance shall be hid from mine eyes. (Hosea 13:14 KJV)

*As for thee also, **by the blood of thy covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water.** (Zec. 9:11 KJV)*

Jesus Preached to the Dead

God’s Plan for the Lost

Elect Rise From Hell On Judgment Day?

Lazarus and the Rich Man: Can the Rich Man Repent and be Saved?

What did the apostle John reveal when he said: “It is the last hour”?

Where Is The Judgment Of Fallen Angels?

The Coming False Christ and His Followers Revealed