

Greetings to you in the precious name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Thank you for joining in this reflection on a remarkable and often overlooked event that occurred during the death and resurrection of Jesus. This event carries deep theological significance and unveils powerful truths about life after death, resurrection, and salvation.

1. The Threefold Ministry of Jesus

The ministry of Jesus can be understood in three phases:

1. **His earthly ministry** — preaching, healing, teaching, and ultimately dying for our sins (John 3:16; Luke 19:10).
2. **His descent to the realm of the dead (Sheol/Hades)** — where He proclaimed victory over death and sin (1 Peter 3:18–20).
3. **His ascension and heavenly ministry** — where He now intercedes for believers (Hebrews 7:25).

While we often emphasize Jesus' time on earth and His current reign in heaven, many overlook His work in Hades. Yet this part of His mission is crucial to understanding the full scope of salvation and victory over death.

2. The Significance of the Graves Opening

Matthew 27:50-53

“And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs after Jesus’ resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people.”

This event demonstrates that Jesus’ death wasn’t just symbolic—it had immediate, tangible effects in both the physical and spiritual realms. It fulfilled prophecies like:

- **Isaiah 26:19:** *“But your dead will live, LORD; their bodies will rise—let those who dwell in the dust wake up and shout for joy.”*

This moment reveals the **inauguration of the resurrection power** through Christ—the “firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Corinthians 15:20). These saints’ temporary resurrection serves as a **foretaste of the general resurrection** at Christ’s second coming (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

3. Before Christ: Death as Imprisonment

In the Old Testament understanding, **Sheol (or Hades)** was a realm where all the dead went—righteous and unrighteous—though their experiences there were not the same (Luke 16:19–31). It was a kind of **spiritual waiting room**. Even the righteous were not in full communion with God but awaited the Redeemer.

- **Hebrews 2:14–15:**

“Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.”

Jesus’ descent into Hades is **not** to suffer but to declare victory and liberate the captives:

- **Ephesians 4:8–9** “When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people. (What does ‘he ascended’ mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions?)”.

4. The Resurrection of the Saints: A Sign of Freedom

The saints who rose and appeared to people in Jerusalem were not ghosts. They were real, physical signs that the power of the grave had

been broken. Their resurrection occurred **after Jesus' resurrection** because Christ is the "firstborn from the dead" (Colossians 1:18, NIV). This confirmed that He alone had the authority to open the graves.

Their appearance shows that **believers are no longer imprisoned by death**. Christ had won the victory:

- **2 Timothy 1:10**

"But it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel."

5. What Happens When a Believer Dies Today?

Since Jesus' resurrection, believers no longer go to a holding place like Sheol. Instead, they go directly to be with the Lord:

- **Luke 23:43**

"Jesus answered him, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.'"

- **Philippians 1:23**

"I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far."

Paradise is now the **dwelling place of the righteous dead**, where they await the final resurrection with joy and peace. There, they live in the presence of Jesus.

6. But What About the Unbeliever?

Those who die in sin, without turning to Christ, are not free. They still go to a place of darkness and separation from God—commonly referred to as **Hades or Hell**.

- **Luke 16:23**

“In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side.”

They await the final judgment, when their fate will be sealed:

- **Revelation 20:14-15**

“Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.”

This is a sobering reality. Without Christ, there is no hope beyond the grave.

7. The Urgency of Salvation

Friend, death can come at any moment, and the return of Christ will be

without warning. The Bible says:

- **Proverbs 27:1**

“Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring.”

- **Hebrews 2:3**

“How shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation?”

Today, Jesus still offers the same victory over sin and death. He is calling you to receive the gift of eternal life—**freely given** through His grace.

8. What Must You Do to Be Saved?

- **Repent** sincerely (Acts 3:19)
- **Believe** in Jesus Christ (John 3:16)
- **Be baptized** for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38)
- **Live** a holy life, walking in the Spirit (Romans 8:1–4)

This is not religion—it is **a relationship with the One who conquered death** for you. If you accept Him today, the grave will never have the final word over your life.

May the Lord bless you and give you peace.

THE GRAVES WERE OPENED, AND THE SAINTS WERE RAISED

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