

What Happens After We Die?

Dr. John Ankerberg and Dr. Erwin Lutzer

Dr. John Ankerberg: One topic that people are always interested in is what will happen to them after they die. In fact, some people are so interesting in finding out about it that they are trying to get information through some rather strange sources. Tell us about some of those.

Dr. Erwin Lutzer: John, the desire for people to find out what lies on the other side of the curtain is so great that some people have asked, "Isn't it possible for us to peer behind that curtain and see what is there?" For example, there is such a thing as "channeling," as all of us know, where you are in contact with spirits and as a result of this contact, supposedly people know what lies on the other side.

One day I was in a library and I picked up the book by Bishop Pike entitled, *The Other Side*. You will remember, his son committed suicide, and he wanted to find out what it was like on the other side and he thought that his son was trying to communicate with him. Pike went to a medium and she was in contact with his son. And I'll never forget some of the conversations that they had.

For example, when the son was asked, "Do they talk about Jesus on the other side?" his response was, "No." He said, "We don't speak much about Jesus here on the other side."

Well, do you know what I would like to do? I would like to suggest, my friend, today, that if you die and you're in a place where they're not talking much about Jesus, you're in the wrong place.

Now, the question is, "How, then, did this spirit, this medium, know information about Bishop Pike's son?" You know, the Bible talks about evil spirits as being "familiar spirits." Did you know that there are actually demonic powers that are acquainted with us; they observe our ways? And so it would be understandable that a medium, being in contact with these spirits, would be able to give information regarding them and regarding the young boy.

Now, listen to what the Scripture says. It is very clear in making sure that we do *not* consult mediums: "And when they say to you, 'Consult the mediums and the spiritists who whisper and mutter,' should not a people consult their God? Should they consult the dead on behalf of the living?" (Isaiah 8:19) God condemns this kind of prying into the spirit world because there are spirits out there that are very deceptive.

Now, there's another means that sometimes people think about and that is "Reincarnation." One day I was on a plane and I was riding with this woman sitting right next to me whose name was Shirley. And when Shirley found out I was a minister, she said, "Oh, I envy you being able to speak to people because I can perform healings and I have all this information!" And then she told me that she believed in reincarnation because she said, "There was this house in Vermont and I would dream about it. I had visions of it."

And she said, "I had never visited the state but as an adult I went there and I found the house and I discovered that I lived there in the 18th century."

And I said, "Shirley, I want you to know something. There is no such thing as the trans-

migration of souls, but there is the transmigration of demons.” I said, “You’re picking this information up from the spirit world. It was evil spirits that gave you this information about that house in Vermont.”

And she looked at me defiantly and said, “Absolutely not! I have nothing to do with evil spirits. I communicate only with those that come to me *clothed in light*.”

Well, what verse of Scripture do you think I gave to Shirley? The Bible says in 2 Corinthians 11:14 that, “Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.” I want to tell you today, my friend, that there is a lot of deception that is going on out there.

Ankerberg: What about near-death experiences. We hear a lot about them. In fact, a few years ago we did a series of programs about them. But just briefly, if you would, tells if we can trust the information that comes from that type of experience?

Lutzer: I’m sure, when we talk about near-death experiences, one of the first things that comes to many people’s mind is the book *Embraced by the Light*, that book by Betty Eadie (which, incidentally, is dedicated to the Lord Jesus Christ). But it’s a book that is very deceptive because it gives the impression that when one dies, Jesus is there to embrace everyone. There is no judgment. And she even makes a statement to the effect that, “I was worthy of Jesus.”

My dear friend, I want you to know that is **not** the Jesus of the New Testament, because the Bible is very clear that death is **not** a wonderful experience for everyone. As a matter of fact, some who have written about this topic have said that some of these people have had a **terrible** experience. They’ve described it, really, as an experience of “Hell,” not a Jesus who embraces everyone.

I remember one woman saying to me, “You know, I had this Near-Death Experience,” and she said, “Jesus took me by the hand and He showed me all the different religions of the world. He said, ‘There is Buddhism,’ and ‘There is Hinduism,’ and ‘There is the Islam faith.’” And she said, “Jesus told me that all of these religions lead to the same destination.”

Again, I want you to know, my friend, that is **not** the Jesus of the Bible who said that He is “the way, the truth and the life,” and that “no one can come to the Father” except by Him (John 14:6). Jesus is very clear regarding who He is. In fact, the Bible says there are many christs and so we should not be surprised at the fact that there are demons out there who even take the name of “Jesus” to deceive (Matt. 24:23-24).

Ankerberg: You know someone is going to ask, so let’s get an answer on the table. What about Stephen?

Lutzer: I love that story in the New Testament (Acts 7) where Stephen is being stoned, you’ll remember, and rocks are being thrown at him and, lo and behold, the heavens are opened and he sees the Son of God standing at the right hand of the throne of God. John, I’ve often thought about that passage because, you know, it is the only place in all the New Testament where Jesus is seen **standing** at the right hand of God the Father. Elsewhere Christ is always seated, but it’s almost as if Jesus is saying, “Stephen, be faithful. Be faith-

ful because the minute you die, I'm here to receive you.”

But here's the point: Is it possible to have a near-death experience? Sometimes people who are in that transition between life and death have talked about seeing relatives—grandfather or grandmother or a child. It's certainly possible. Stephen saw the Lord Jesus Christ before he died.

But I want to warn you today that Satan would like to give the same positive experience to everyone. And that's where the deception comes in. There is no such thing as having a near-death experience that is completely authoritative unless it squares with what God says death is all about.

Now, here is my take on it. I'm not so much interested in what happens when I'm “near” death. I want to know what happens when I actually die. It is not so much the transition that concerns me as it is the final destination. I want to share this from my heart to you today.

Frankly, I think it's arrogant for people to trust their near-death experiences. I do not want to trust someone who was only “near” death, because I'm not so much interested in the transition. I'm interested in the final destination. How much better to trust someone who actually **was dead** and then came back from the dead so that He can tell us what lies on the other side. I think of the words of Jesus in Revelation 1:18. He said, “I am He that liveth and was dead and am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.”

At the end of the day, we do need a reliable map. We need a reliable guide who can help us know what is on the other side. And only Jesus Christ qualifies. And that's why we have to hang onto every word that He said in the New Testament because **He alone** is able to tell us what happens after we die.