

Patriarchs in Paradise

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[0 : 00] Patriarchs in Paradise. Paradise. Welcome to the Providence Podcast.

My name is Chris Oswald, Senior Pastor at Providence Community Church. Today we are going to be talking about Patriarchs in Paradise. We have a lot of biblical data about the Patriarchs in eternity, in the presence of God.

And I wanted to take all that data in and sort of synthesize it and give you a quick rundown of what the Bible teaches about this fascinating topic.

So let's go ahead and get into it. Firstly, I want to start in Luke chapter 23, verse 39. And this is when the criminals are hanging with Jesus, next to Jesus on the cross.

So Luke 23, 39. I'm going to read a lot of scripture today. Luke 23, 39. One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, Are you not the Christ?

[1 : 11] Save yourself and us. But the other rebuked him, saying, Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward for our deeds.

But this man has done nothing wrong. And he said, Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. And he, Jesus, said to him, Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.

So I introduce this verse first, simply to establish that in some way, to be absent from the body is to be united with the Lord, Paul tells us.

And that when a Christian dies, they wind up with the Lord in paradise. Now this is relevant, because we're going to begin thinking about the patriarchs in paradise. And the first brick in our little argument here is that soul sleep is simply not a thing.

As Paul says, when someone dies, when they're absent from the body, they are united with the Lord. When someone dies in Christ, which includes the patriarchs, they are immediately in the presence of God.

[2 : 17] And here's the basic question we're going to try to answer in this, what I think is going to be a relatively brief podcast. And that is, well, okay, patriarchs died a long time ago.

So they've been up in paradise for a long time. And, you know, what have they been up to? So let's go next to Luke chapter 9, verse 28. And this is describing the Mount of Transfiguration experience. Luke chapter 9, verse 28. Now about eight days after these sayings, he took with him Peter and John and James and went up to the mountain to pray. And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white.

And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.

Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep. But when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. As the men were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus, Master, it is good that we are here.

[3 : 24] Let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah, not knowing what he said. And as he was saying these things, a cloud came and overshadowed them. And they were afraid as they entered the cloud.

And a voice came out of the cloud saying, This is my son, my chosen one. Listen to me. Listen to him. And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone.

And they kept silent and told no one in those days anything of what they had seen. Okay, so from this text, I take the following. Moses and Elijah have some kind of responsibility given to them by God.

They were there to do a job, which was to speak with Jesus about his departure, about his death. The Greek word there is actually the word for Exodus. To speak with Jesus about his Exodus.

Now, let's go from there to Matthew chapter 8, verse 5. This is the story of when the centurion, who would have been a Gentile, comes to Jesus and asks him to heal his servant.

[4 : 32] Matthew 8, 5. When he had entered Capernaum, a centurion came forward to him, appealing to him, Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly. And he said to him, I will come and heal him.

But the centurion replied, Lord, I'm not worthy to have you come under my roof. But only say the word and my servant will be healed. For I too am a man under authority with soldiers under me. And I say to one, go, and he goes. And to another, come, and he comes. And to my servant, do this, and he does it. When Jesus heard this, he marveled and said to those who followed him, Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith.

I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness.

In that place, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And to the centurion, Jesus said, go, let it be done. Go, let it be done for you as you have believed.

[5 : 33] And the servant was healed at that very moment. Okay, so what have we established so far? We've got this sense that when they died, when Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and Moses and the boys died, they were in the presence of God immediately.

The second one is from the transfiguration story. We've got this sense that Moses and Elijah were sent to do a job. What do we get from this one? Well, I think what we get from this one is that Abraham is probably throwing a feast, or the head of a feast, in heaven.

And just like we saw with Moses and Elijah, Abraham has some responsibility in the presence of God, which would not surprise any of us. These men and women were created to work.

We will always have work to do, even in eternity. Okay, so let's move on to the next text, which is Luke 16, 19. And this is the parable that Jesus tells about the rich man and Lazarus.

He says, there was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen, who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table.

[6 : 47] Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. And in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side.

And he called out, Father Abraham, have mercy on me and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue. For I am in anguish in this flame.

But Abraham said, Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things. But now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish.

And besides all this, between us and you, there's a great chasm that has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.

And he said, Then I beg you, Father, to send him to my father's house. For I have five brothers, so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.

[7 : 50] But Abraham said, They have Moses and the prophets. Let them hear them. And he said, No, Father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent. And he said, If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.

There's just so much to unpack there. We won't get into all that. We're just answering this specific question related to the patriarchs. What we see here is that Lazarus was carried to Abraham's side. And I think this is just a reference to the common feast table setting, seating arrangements at feasts. Something we also see in the biblical account of the Last Supper, when John is seated in a position that Lazarus is seated in in this text.

In Abraham's bosom is how the King James would say it. It'd say the same thing about John in the Last Supper. So this is a position of honor. Again, we've got Abraham.

This is twice now that we've seen Jesus' sort of behind-the-scenes imagery of Abraham doing a particular thing, a feast.

[9 : 02] The second thing we see from this story is that from the rich man's perspective, Abraham has some authority. He's asking Abraham to help him.

Then he asks him to do something, first of all, that Abraham cannot do, namely to send Lazarus to cool him off, for he is in anguish. And Abraham says, we can't do that. There's a great gulf between

us.

But then the rich man asks Abraham to send Lazarus to warn his brothers. And here Abraham doesn't say that's impossible, but rather it won't work. They won't listen. They have Moses and the prophets.

Let them hear them. And if they don't hear Moses and the prophets, they won't believe a man raised from the dead. Does Abraham actually have that ability? Well, if he did, it would be because God gave it to him. And we don't know for sure if that's really a possibility or not.

My point is just that somehow Abraham appears to be a man of authority even in heaven. Now, incidentally, again, this ties back to what I said on Sunday.

[10:03] It's pretty interesting to think of just even in this particular moment, Abraham saying, you know, hey, let him listen to Moses. Moses isn't just an idea. Moses is a person in the presence of God as well.

And so this is all very interesting to me and my imagination. So what do we do with this information? Well, it sure frames Hebrews 11 and 12 more clearly.

So Hebrews 11 and 12, Hebrews 11, that's the passage that says that all of these, you know, heroes of the faith, you know, trusted in the Lord in their unique circumstances, so forth.

And then in verse 39 of Hebrews 11, it says, And all of these, all these heroes of the faith, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us, they should not be made perfect.

But perfect, remember, in the Bible is, you know, full, complete, something like that. So God didn't let Abraham or Moses see everything that they were promised come to pass.

[11:17] They didn't let them see that until the incarnation of Jesus Christ. And at that time, Abraham sees, okay, I will become a father of many nations.

Did he know the plan as soon as he was united with God? I don't know the answer to that. I don't know. I don't. There's a lot of things that we wouldn't know. But I think the basic idea of this passage is that these men died and are in the process now, in the presence of God, of seeing God's promises fulfilled to them in real time, as the people of God are gathered, as the lost sheep are gathered from east or west, as Abraham is actually made into the father of many nations.

And I think that's what Jesus is getting at in John 8, 56, when he says, Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it and was glad. Why was he glad?

Because the promise was fulfilled in a way above and beyond all that he could ask or imagine. And he was seeing all of this from his banquet seat, I think, is the right way to think about that.

So that's one thing. As I mentioned in the sermon, if you're in Christ, you're a son or daughter of Abraham, and he didn't get to see all this before he died, but he's seeing it play out now, and he's been seeing it for the last 3,600 years or so.

[12:39] So that's interesting. And then it also just gives us a clear understanding of Hebrews 12. Hebrews 12, 1 through 2 is, Well, let's make sure that we've got the full sort of orbbed meaning of witness here.

In one sense, you've got this idea almost as a stadium of the saints gathered to see the story of God play out today in your life and in my life and around the world.

The Haunted Cosmos guys posted on Twitter the other day, like, hey, what would you like us to cover? And I commented, you know, what would you like us to cover in a future episode?

I covered, like, would you do a deep dive into the conversion of Muslims via dreams that's been happening for a long time now?

Think about that. Like, think about that. Abraham is watching Muslims in Iran come to Christ, you know? And then just think about all the history that comes up behind that and how God is, to this day, undoing, you know, that fateful Hagar thing.

[14:10] You know, it's just got to be a remarkable thing to be in heaven and to see all the dots connecting. And to see it in a way that is, you know, all rooted in, inextricably rooted in joy in the Lord.

You know, it's, it's not just fascinating, it's, it's fascinating. And also like, it makes you want to worship Jesus even more on the throne. So, so the witnesses are in some sense, they're watching, you know, but witnesses also has this sense of they're testifying, like, you know, at a trial.

And what they're testifying in is, is that what they're testifying of is that God can be trusted. They're, they're a great cloud of witnesses proclaiming the trustworthiness of God or attesting to the

trustworthiness of God.

We have, as we walk through the, the word, we'll see all of these men, all of these patriarchs, waver, wander, sin. And they would all tell us, you know, I wish I had trusted God more, but boy, he has been remarkable to me.

I'm not sure how to end this. I mean, I could, I could definitely cite, you know, Paul's statement in the Ephesians to, now to him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all we could ask or imagine.

[15 : 32] But I thought I would leave you with one last patriarchal, patriarch in paradise glimpse. And that's in Revelation 15, one through four. Revelation 15, one.

Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and amazing, seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last. For with them, the wrath of God is finished. And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire.

And also those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands. And they sang the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the lamb saying.

Now, that's verse three of Revelation 15. Here we have the unity of the New and Old Testament. We have the unity of the covenants. We have the unity of law and gospel.

They sing both the song of Moses and of the lamb. And the song is great and amazing are your deeds. Oh, Lord God, the almighty.

[16 : 37] Just and true are your ways. Oh, king of the nations. Who will not fear? Oh, Lord, and glorify your name. For you alone are holy. All nations will come to you and worship you.

For your righteous acts have been revealed. Well, that's all I've got, friends. Patriarchs in paradise. There's some interesting scriptures connected, sort of illuminating other scriptures more clearly, like Hebrews 11 and 12.

You are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, men and women who have walked with God faithfully but not perfectly, who saw God do amazing things in their lives.

And they are both observing God's plan play out in your life today and also testifying that he is worthy of your trust. May God bless you this week. I'll talk to you later.