



What's Behind Your **LIGHT?**

The Birth of a Sermon  
Just After Death...What Then?

DR. JAMES WILKINS

**Visit Dr. Wilkins' website to learn more about the author, Dr. James Wilkins, and his books. You can order this current book and his other books at: [www.JamesWilkins.org](http://www.JamesWilkins.org)**

## BIRTH OF A SERMON

I was preaching in a revival in a city on the coast of Southern California. This was long before the pollution and traffic marred the beauty of that picturesque countryside.

The pastor and I were finishing a visit and were preparing to leave, when our hostess, Mary (not her real name), asked if we had time to visit an old lady who was all but a shut-in that lived next door. After we assured her that we did, she took us over, knocked on the door and led us in to the house and introduced us. The lady was very gracious and seemed to be quite honored that two pastors would come to her “humble home,” as she called it.

The lady had a beautiful smile and seemed to be a woman of some means and well educated. But she was suffering from severe arthritis. I noticed that her hands were puffy, swollen, and twisted.

After we visited for a bit, I asked her where she went to church.

“I haven’t for a long time,” was her answer, “but I’ve got things all fixed up.”

“You have things all fixed up?” I questioned.

“Yes,” she replied. “My will is in order. I’ve paid for my funeral services and for the cemetery plot. So, I am ready to go.”

“When you say that you are ready to go, do you mean, you are ready to die?”

“Oh, a person will never die,” she explained. “I use to be afraid of death. It was frightening to me. That is before I learned the truth. A lady who worked with me taught me not to be afraid of death.”

“Is that right?” came my pleasant inquiry.

“How did she do that?” I continued.

She turned and asked her neighbor, “Will you please open the drapes?” Mary got up and obediently drew the drapes. What I saw was breathtaking; the Pacific Ocean was so blue and calm. “That’s beautiful!” I exclaimed.

“If you think that is beautiful, you should wait another half hour or so when the sun has set. Just after the sun has dropped below the horizon, its rays color the clouds and there is darkness all around it... That is death,” she exclaimed with almost a girlish enthusiasm.

“What do you mean?” I inquired.

She seemed somewhat disappointed that I, a spiritual leader, could not comprehend why there is no death.

“That is something that archaic religion uses to scare people.”

I started to interrupt, but I allowed her to continue.

“I know because I used to be one of them, that is, until I learned better. They taught me that there wasn’t any death and little by little I learned the truth. Now, **death is like that beautiful sunset that reaches beyond the endless horizon.**”

She smiled and asked, “Isn’t that beautiful?”

“Yes,” I answered, “you painted a beautiful picture, but I am not quite clear about a couple of things.”

She leaned forward as if to accept the role of teacher who had an inquiring student.

“Yes, and what are they?” she asked.

“Where does God fit into this beautiful picture?”

“Oh, I believe in a higher power,” she announced.

“That he created man,” I continued.

“Well, we got here somehow,” she answered.

All the time I was very gentle, respecting her opinion.

“What about the Bible? Do you believe it is God’s word?”

“That’s what mom and dad taught me when I was a child, but I don’t know about that. Every time I’ve tried to read it,” she paused, “I just can’t understand it and some of the

things in it trouble me.”

All the time we were talking, I was sitting in a chair right next to her and looking her in the face. My questions and comments were not judgmental; my complete attention to her comments seemed to be giving me favor with her.

For the first time, the pastor spoke, “Excuse me, Brother Jim, I hate to interrupt but dinner is waiting on us. By the time we eat we will barely have time to get to the services.” I glanced at my watch and was surprised. We were going to have to hurry...

I announced to my new friend, “It has been so nice meeting you and being in your home.”

“Thank you for coming,” she replied.

“Let me invite you to our services tomorrow night. I will be preaching out of the same Bible your mother and father used when you were a girl. And do you know what my subject will be?” I inquired.

“No, what?” she sweetly asked.

“My subject tomorrow night is on this very same subject. I’ve titled it, **‘What happens to a person when they die?’**”

“That sounds very interesting,” she said, “but some days I just can’t move and it just kills me to sit very long.”

“I’ll take the chair you like to sit in when you come to my house and you can ride with us,” offered Mary.

“We’ll see,” she said.

I prayed a short prayer, asking God to bless her just before leaving. My heart was deeply touched and it seemed like hers was also.

As we drove toward church and our dinner appointment, my mind was on the way she had described death. Death is not real, all one has to do, is look at the golden beauty of a sunset that expands into the endless horizon. . .

My mind flashed to an almost near death experience that happened when I was traveling home after a revival around 3:00 or 4:00 in the morning.

I took a shortcut, one that I was very familiar with. On this particular stretch of highway, the highway ran parallel to railroad tracks and then angled over the railroad tracks to the other side. Back fifty years ago, some of the railroad crossings didn’t have signal lights like they do today.

As I was driving, I saw what **I thought were the lights of car** coming straight toward me. They came nearer and nearer and we were approaching each other at a combined speed of 100 miles an hour. Then I realized,

THAT'S NOT A CAR, THAT'S A TRAIN... I slammed on my breaks and slide to a stop with the hood of my car directly under the guardrail. The nearness of the train shook my car as I roared on.

That's what my new friend was doing; she was driving at full speed toward a beautiful sunset that was going to become the boiling fires of Hell. That is also what my Catholic friends were doing. They were calming their fears of death by thinking they were going **into the purging fire of purgatory**. They would not be as fortunate as I had been when I discovered the truth about that bright light that was racing toward me.

They will calmly focus on what they think will be the final cleansing only to find they will be engulfed in the eternal fires of Hell with no hope of escape.

These thoughts were deeply troubling to me as a young preacher as I sought **God's wisdom and guidance in preparing a message that would help my new friend see the truth**.

In my heart I knew she would be in church the next evening. Sure enough, as services were about to commence, I saw Mary's car pull into the parking lot. As Mary assisted her from the car into the church, I saw



Mary's husband get her chair out of the trunk of the car and place it in the center aisle directly in front of the pulpit about half way back.

God had convinced me **that all of my logic and human reasoning** would not convince my friend to change her mind about death. God, himself, was the only hope that this dear lady and the many, just like her, had.

I felt his personal leadership to preach an old fashion sermon from the Bible that He, through the Holy Spirit, would convict and convert my dear friend. I didn't believe a Bible study or a lecture would help her at all. It would take a spirit-filled sermon blessed by God.

I went to the pulpit after a beautiful special and asked the congregation to turn their Bibles to Job 14:14.

I read the verse, "*If a man die, shall he live again? All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come.*"

Then I began the sermon by repeating part of the verse. ***If a man die, shall he live again?*** This thought had injected itself into the minds and consciousness of **every man** who has ever lived.

If a man die, will he live again or **just after death**,  
**what then?**

**The poet pondered this  
question when he wrote:**

The clock of life is wound but once and no man hath  
the power

To tell just when the hands will stop

At late or early hour

To lose one's **wealth is sad** indeed

To lose one's health **is more**

But to lose one's **soul is such a loss**

**That no man can restore**

**The songwriter penned  
the question this way:**

Just after death, oh answer me

Where will you spend eternity?

When time on earth shall cease to be

Just after death – the moment after death – **what  
then?**

I continued my introduction by saying, “Many years ago I read a story about a private detective who described different events in the story that happened to him.”

“He was hit on the head and knocked unconscious during the story. He described the experience in the following way:

“When I was hit on the head my vision began to spin around and around until it turned into a mighty ocean wave. I resisted the power of the wave with all of my might. But in spite of all I did, the ocean wave overcame me and I went down, **down, down into the blackness of unconsciousness.**”

Friend, when you go down, **down, down into the darkness of death, what then?**

## THERE ARE MANY THEORIES AND PHILOSOPHIES

There are many theories, superstitions, and philosophies about what happens to man when he dies. Let us consider some of them.

**First**, in Africa there is a group of people who worship the sun. The leaders of the tribe will dedicate and train young boys to be priests who will dedicate themselves to pray to the sun early in the morning. The boys are placed facing the east as the sun rises to begin their daily intercessions for

their people. They will continue to face the sun and pray to it until it goes down at night. Often times the boys **will have severe pain and spasms, it is not long until they go blind.**

Why? Why do they do it?

They are trying to prepare their people for **the moment after death.**

**Secondly**, in times past many have offered their children as human sacrifices to a dead idol.

Why?

They are preparing for the moment **just after death.**

**Third**, many bow down to images while counting beads, chanting prayers, or lighting candles.

Why?

They are trying to prepare **for just after death.**

## THERE IS ONLY ONE TRUE TESTED SOURCE

Although most people have their ideas of how to prepare for **just after death**, there is only one true tested source of information. That true tested source is the Bible, God's holy word.

The Bible is the only book that tells man **who He is.**

The Bible is the only source that tells man **where he came from.**

The Bible is the only true tested source that tells man **why he is going to die.**

The Bible is the only true tested source that tells man **where he is going when he dies.**

The Bible boldly states:

*“In the beginning, God created the Heavens and the earth.”* A few verses later, God spoke and said, *“Let us make man in our image and likeness.”*

The Bible declares, *“God is from everlasting to everlasting or eternal.”* (Proverbs 90:2) That means that part of man **is eternal or will never die.**

God taught Adam about death and warned him that if he sinned he would be separated from God.

The Bible teaches that God is a brilliant God who made man with great intelligence and **THE RIGHT TO MAKE HIS OWN CHOICES.**

The Bible teaches that God made a beautiful paradise for Adam where they would walk and fellowship together. In that beautiful paradise, God placed two special trees. One was the **tree of knowledge of good and evil** while the

other was **the tree of life**.

God told Adam, *“If you eat of the tree of knowledge, you will die. If you eat of the tree of life, you will live forever.”*

Adam was like a little child who could not comprehend the full significance of death. So when Adam was put to sleep so God could create Eve, it was like the **sleep of death**. When Adam awoke he had a beautiful wife and companion. He also understood that if he ate of the tree of knowledge, **HE WOULD DIE**.

God allowed the devil, in the form of a beautiful creature, to bewitch Eve into eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge and then giving it to her husband **who willingly disobeyed God and sinned**.

Instantly their eyes were opened and they realized they were separated from God by their sin.

The word **“death” means “separated.”** There are two different deaths; there is the physical death when the soul (the spiritual part of man) is separated from his body. At the physical death, the real person living within the physical body moves out. The body has no life because its life has returned to God who gave it. The body becomes lifeless and cold.

**There is another death**, it is a time when the soul leaves the physical house and is separated from God and Heaven. This death is called **the Second Death and is the place God created for the devil**. The Bible declares that God created Hell for the devil and his angels. He did not intend for man to go to Hell. But man, made in the image of an eternal God, **is an eternal being**. When he dies in his sins, he will go into Hell, an eternal place.

The Bible declares, *“Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.”*

**Just after death, oh answer me, where will man spend eternity?**

## IT WILL BE ONE OF TWO PLACES

He created man to spend eternity with Him in a perfect paradise, called Heaven. But when Adam rebelled against God in his natural state, as a sinner, he will be separated from God in Hell.

Let us examine some of the characteristics of these two



places that will serve as **the eternal abode of all people.**

## THE HORRORS OF HELL

*“Knowing therefore the terrors of the Lord, we persuade men.”* (II Corinthians 5:11) This is one of the incentives that stirred Paul’s heart and caused him to sacrifice himself in his efforts to *“...by all means save some...”* This thought should also stir the hearts of God’s people today and cause them to become living sacrifices in their efforts to save the lost.

## THE CERTAINTY OF HELL

Is there really a place of literal fire, eternal in duration, which will torment the doomed forever? The Bible says there is! If one is to accept the Bible, he must accept this awful fact also. Nothing could be said that would add to or take away from the truth of these Scriptures. All of the following Scriptures positively state that there is a Hell!

*“Danger of **Hell fire.**” (Matthew 5:22)*

*“And fear not them who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul and body **IN HELL**” (Matthew 10:28)*

*“And shall cast them into the furnace of **FIRE**; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.” (Matthew 23:33)*

*“Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers. How can you escape the **DAMNATION OF HELL**?” (Matthew 23:33)*

*“Depart from me, ye cursed into **EVERLASTING FIRE.**” (Matthew 25:41)*

*“And these shall go away into **EVERLASTING PUNISHMENT** but the righteous into life eternal.” (Matthew 25:46)*

*“To go into **HELL**, into **THE FIRE**, that never shall quench.” (Mark 9:43)*

*“To be cast into **HELL**, into **THE FIRE** that never shall be quenched, where their worm dieth not and **THE FIRE** is not quenched.” (Mark 9:45, 46)*

*“To be cast into **HELL FIRE**, where the worm dieth not and **THE FIRE** is not quenched.” (Mark 9:47, 48)*

*“The rich man died and **IN HELL** he lifted up his eyes,*

*being in TORMENT... and he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me ... for I am TORMENTED IN THIS FLAME.”* (Luke 16:23, 24)

*“To whom is RESERVED THE BLACKNESS OF DARKNESS FOREVER.”* (Jude 13)

*“And the smoke of THEIR TORMENT ASCENDETH UP FOREVER AND EVER; and they have NO REST DAY OR NIGHT!”* (Revelation 14:11)

These are but a few of the Scriptures, which teach there is a literal, eternal place of separation for the lost.

**Thirteen Times More.** There are thirteen times as many Scriptures about Hell as about Heaven. Many of these references, especially those about “**Gehenna**,” or the eternal abode of the lost, **came from the lips of Jesus**. So if one believes in Heaven, he has thirteen times more reason to believe in Hell.

**The Same Term Refers To Both.** The expression in the Greek, “eis aionas ton aionon,” means “to the ages of the ages” or as the King James scholars translated it, “forever and ever.” It is used to reference **the joys and duration of**

**Heaven, as well as the torments and duration of Hell.** If it means forever and ever when it is speaking of Heaven, it must mean the same thing when it refers to Hell. The certainty of a place called Hell is based upon the eternal, inspired Word of God and must be accepted by all that believe the Bible.

## THE CHARACTER OF HELL

**The Valley Of Hinnon.** Jesus used an object lesson to teach His disciples about the character of Hell. He took them just outside the city of Jerusalem to a place called “Gehenna” in the Valley of Hinnon. It had been used in the past to offer human sacrifices to false gods. A righteous king stopped this, and **the valley was made into a city dump.** Jesus took the disciples out to the huge place of debris to teach them about the eternal home of the

doomed.

## A PLACE OF FILTH

Not only is Hell a place of literal FIRE but also **it is the nastiest, filthiest place** that could possibly exist. It is a madhouse of noise and confusion. A person with a sound mind and nerves of steel could not stand the filth, noise and confusion that saturate Hell for ten minutes before he would begin to crack up.

Jesus tried to impress this upon the minds of the apostles as he introduced them to the city dump where dead bodies filled with maggots and worms devoured the decaying flesh under the stifling heat and sickening smell. The Valley of Hinnon where young children were offered as living sacrifices was turned into a huge dump ground. The Jews added “Ge” to Hinnon, making it Gehenna to denote the place of eternal torments. Jesus used the term “Gehenna” to impress upon the minds of His disciples **the literal awfulness of Hell – a place of fire, filth, unbearable stench, and chaos.**

Once when I was a silly teenaged kid, I asked my older brother Joe, who had been in five major battles in World War II and was wounded twice, about the most awful thing of war.

His answer, along with the tone of his voice, caused me never to mention the war again.

He said, "During the heat of the summer, our division invaded an island held by the Japanese. The Japanese had suffered heavy casualties and after three days of intense fighting retreated to higher ground. We advanced and took over the same line of defense that the Japanese had just vacated. There were dead bodies everywhere and the stench was unbearable. The cry of the wounded and dieing men was unnerving. The decay of dead bodies, the files, the doom and depression caused by dying men was so horrendous that I didn't think I could stand it. **I was tempted to stand up so that an enemy soldier could shoot me.** The only thing that prevented me from doing that was **the knowledge that the battle would soon be over.**"

When a person dies and goes to Hell he will suffer all of that. After the resurrection of the lost they will stand before God in their old, sick, decaying bodies. Those who suffer

in broken bodies will still suffer **in broken bodies**. Those who craved for dope, alcohol, or sex **will still suffer in their additions**.

There will be no restraints in Hell, anarchy will reign as masses driven by the pain and addictions will assault the other helpless inmates.

But, unlike my brother Joe, there will be no light of HOPE at the end of the tunnel. Their guilt, the thought of what could have been, and the literal hopelessness of this situation will cause them to **weep, wail, and gnash their teeth forever**.

Jesus is the one who stated, *“The smoke of their torment will ascend up forever! They will have no rest, day or night, forever.”*

**Sinner, this is the place God is trying to save you from.**

**Sinner, this is your future, eternal home unless you repent.**

**The old songwriter so aptly wrote:**  
“Let others seek a home below  
Where fire devours and waves overflow,

Be mine a happier lot to own  
**A Heavenly mansion** near to His throne.  
I'm going home, I'm going home  
**To die no more."**

## THE SAINTS BEAUTIFUL HOME IN HEAVEN

**Heaven is a real place.** It is just as real as Los Angeles, New York City, or Dallas.

Jesus declared, "*In my Father's house **are many mansions.***" In the book of Revelation, it speaks of the Holy City that has streets of gold.

Throughout the Old Testament, it refers to those who died as being "***gathered to their people.***" Paul stated that to be absent from the body is to present with the Lord. He said, "*For to me, to live is Christ and **to die is gain.***"

The angels gathered Lazarus to paradise when he died while Jesus received Stephen into Heaven personally when he suffered martyrdom for his Savior.

To me, the greatest picture of Heaven is found in



Revelation 21, where God descends down to earth from Heaven, **wipes away all the tears, and becomes the loving father to live with his children.** The homecoming scene brings such joy and anticipation to my heart that I can hardly wait to experience it (Heaven).

But the best thing about the joy and splendor of Heaven that is so real and wonderful is it will never end. Paul's comments found in Ephesians 2:7 describe the eternal bliss of Heaven, *"That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus."*

## THE TERRIBLE DOOM OF MAN AND OF EARTH

Because of Adam's sin, the human race and mother earth were condemned to eternal doom and ruin if they were left to themselves. Man has no knowledge of how hopeless his situation is. Man, left to himself, is speeding to destruction and eternal separation from God in Hell.

## THE CROSS OF JESUS

On the road to Hell, God has placed the Cross of Calvary in front of every sinner.

The wages of sin is death and every man has sinned and owes that debt. If he paid for his sins personally, he would suffer forever in the filth and fire of Hell.

God demonstrated His love for each sinner by giving His son Jesus to die on the cross **as the sinner's substitute.**

If the sinner ever goes to Heaven, he must come to the front of that cross, bow before God, confess his sins, and ask God for mercy.

His prayer must be - 'God, I am a sinner. If I paid for my sins I would be separated from you in Hell forever. Please **accept** the death of Jesus as payment for my sins. I now accept Him into my heart and life as my Savior.'

If a man goes to Hell, **he must close his eyes to the cross of a loving Savior.** He must close his ears to the prayers of God's people who are praying for his salvation. He must resist the convicting and wooing of the Holy Spirit. He must refuse the message of the preacher and of God's people.

## TWO THIEVES HUNG ON TWO CROSSES

Two thieves hung on separate crosses next to Jesus while He died as their substitute on the cross in the middle.

One confessed his sins and by faith asked for mercy and forgiveness.

The other thief only thought of his selfish needs and prayed for physical deliverance.

Both thieves died.

**One accepted Jesus' payment** for his sins and went to paradise.

**The other did not accept Jesus' offer of mercy and forgiveness.** He had to pay for his own sins.

One went to Heaven because his Savior paid for his sins.

One went to Hell because the law and justice of a holy God demanded payment. The payment or wages of sin is death or separation from God in Hell.

**Just after death, oh answer me, WHERE WILL YOU SPEND ETERNITY?**

When time on earth shall cease to be – just after death, the

moment after death – **where will you be?**

BOW YOUR HEAD AND CLOSE YOUR EYES,  
PLEASE

I want you to imagine that the service is over, after visiting with those around you, you get into your car and start home. But your mind is still on the subject, Just After Death... Your thoughts are – Where will I spend eternity? Just then your thoughts are interrupted as the headlights of the car reveals a bicycle.

**It's a little boy!!!** And he wobbled right out in front of your car.

You swerve to miss the boy. In doing so...your car gets right in front of a speeding 18-wheeler. You try to miss the truck and slam on the brakes, **but it is too late!**

**The terrifying headlights become brighter and brighter, closer and closer,** and time seems to stand still. Everything seems to be in slow motion... You think to yourself, **‘What's behind those lights...** Is it an endless land of beauty? Or is that the beginning of purgatory where

I'll begin to be purified by fire of my sins. I wonder... **How long will it take? Days, weeks, years of being in pain while my sins are being purged. What if my friends and family forget me?"**

Your thoughts are interrupted by the horrible crash as your car runs head on into the speeding truck!

Upon the impact you are thrown forward striking your head on the windshield and **your vision begins to spin....** It spins faster and faster until the darkness becomes like a huge ocean wave flooding over you. **You feel yourself falling down, down, down...**

Then, to your horror, you begin to hear the screams and cries of the condemned souls in Hell. You realize that the light was an endless eternal place. IT was not the temporary place of purgatory. That light is the fire of hell.

You begin to smell the most sickening odors that instantly cause you to **become sick all over.**

The doom and gloom of the depressing spirit of hopelessness that saturates the place causes you to begin to weep.

All of a sudden you begin to feel the fires of Hell reaching up to engulf your body.

Reality hits you as you realize that just after death, the

moment after death **YOU ARE IN HELL...**

On the other hand, as you stick your head and the black ocean wave of death begins to overcome your soul...

Would you feel the gentle hands of the angel begin to lift you up from the darkness of death **into the glorious light of Heaven?**

You are speechless at its beauty. Your ears begin to hear the most inspiring music...it is intoxicating...

Your eyes begin to see the huge welcoming crowd gathered there to greet you – you see your loved ones – and the spirit of love and comfort overwhelms you as you burst out singing when you realize that **YOU ARE IN HEAVEN.**

Just after death...which will it be, Heaven or Hell?

Which eternal home will you occupy?

One of doom and gloom, of pain and suffering forever?

Or one of joy and bliss in the home your loving Savior prepared for just you?

**Just after death, oh answer me! Where will you spend eternity?**

**When time on earth has ceased to be – just after death.**

**At the moment after death – WHERE WILL YOU**

# **SPEND ETERNITY? HEAVEN OR HELL...?**

Dear Friend, Please bow your head and make sure you are saved. Say to your friend, Jesus who is waiting to hear your prayer...

‘Dear God, I am a lost, condemned sinner. Please forgive me of all my sins and save me from Hell.’

‘Dear Jesus, Come into my heart. I accept you with all of my heart as my Savior.’

## **SHE CAME FORWARD**

As I gave that invitation, so many years ago, I saw my newfound friend struggle to get up out of her chair. After a moment she was able to stand, she stumbled a little bit until she took a step or two. Then she walked forward to receive Christ as her Savior.

I met her there and gently stopped her from getting down

on her knees and asked her to sit on the alter instead.

I will never forget the humble way she asked God to forgive her of her sins. The tears that streamed down her check soon became tears of joy as she exclaimed over and over again...

**“It is real, it is real and it is so wonderful.”**

Out of a whole week of meetings, there were only two people saved. But it was worth it! I will never forget those puffy, twisted hands.

I will never forget her exclaiming, **“It is real, it is real and it is so wonderful.”**

No longer would she have to look across the beautiful Pacific Ocean at the sunset and imagine it was the door of death that was beautiful. She had entered through **the real door (Jesus)** and found God’s true forgiveness and salvation and it was real – **it was real AND IT IS WONDERFUL!**