

Is Life After Death a Fairy Tale?

1 Cor. 15:35-42

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Recently, Stephen Hawking, the world's most famous scientist died at age 76. Hawking was diagnosed with ALS at age 21 and was one of the world's oldest survivors with this devastating disease.

He was able to move only a couple of fingers and could communicate only through a computer assisted device designed to speak for him.

Hawking wrote several books. One of them entitled "A Brief History of Time" sold more than ten million copies. It's one of the most sold books of science.

The book is about the study of laws that predict how things work in the universe. It's also about how we see the universe and how the universe exists.

There is no doubt within the scientific community about this man's intellectual capabilities. He even became part of pop culture and has been spoken of in the same sentence with Galileo and Einstein.

A lot of what he offered to us was in the form of scientific theory. He spent a lot of his time going back in time, theorizing about what might have occurred to bring us up to this point in our existence.

He also theorized about what might happen to humanity in the future if we continue our same path.

In the process, Hawking threw a lot of shade on religion and those who believe in a Creator God, saying that such people still seek a divine solution to counter the ideas of curious physicists.

Poking fun at those who believe in a Divine Creator, Hawking once asked jokingly, "What was God doing before the divine creation? Was he preparing hell for people who asked such questions?" (<https://www.space.com/20710-stephen-hawking-god-big-bang.html>)

Hawking might have been surprised that many Christians also ask deep questions. I've often wondered myself, "What WAS God doing before there was nothing?"

I wish he had met more Christians who are not afraid or opposed to deep thinking, scientific theory, or discovery.

Hawking spent much of his life in the realm of the theoretical, albeit backed by some form of science, while Christians spend much of our lives in the practical, backed up by some form of faith that we place in God through Christ.

This is not without our own sources of logic, deep thought, and study. Of course, I'll admit, some people have some beliefs that even I find illogical.

We should not find it surprising that a man like Hawking, who was scientifically trained, should have problems with faith, or mixing faith and science.

Nor should we be surprised that he viewed the body and mind as temporary vessels that have a limited time span. In fact, I don't think the Bible disagrees with this. Our bodies and minds, in their current form, are temporary vessels that have a limited span.

The Apostle Paul put it this way: "I need to emphasize, friends, that our natural, earthly lives don't in themselves lead us by their very nature into the kingdom of God. Their very 'nature' is to die, so how could they 'naturally' end up in the Life kingdom?" (1 Corinthians 15:50 The Message Bible)

For Hawking, once our time expires, the person becomes no different than any other matter which lives and dies and becomes a part of the earth.

Hawking said, "I regard the brain as a computer which will stop working when its components fail." "There is no heaven or afterlife for broken down computers; that is a fairy story for people afraid of the dark." (<https://www.usatoday.com/story/tech/nation-now/2018/03/14/heaven-fairy-story-what-stephen-hawking-says-happens-when-people-die/423344002/>)

We know that Hawking depended on a computer much of his life to assist him with his language and many of his other tasks.

What if he had gone around the world telling people that the computer he used spontaneously created itself out of nothing without the help of a master mind, as he theorized the universe did some 18.5 billion years ago?

Many people would have thought he'd lost his mind.

However, scientifically and theologically, Hawking was right when he said that there is no heaven for these bodies as we know them.

These parts, including our brains, when they stop working, are going to be buried or incinerated, or will decay somewhere. They will eventually become dust. That is a scientific fact.

"From dust you came and to dust you shall return," as we say at the beginning of Lent during our Ash Wednesday service as we place the sign of the cross on your foreheads. These are words from the book of Ecclesiastes. (3:20).

So technically, we are with Hawking on this matter scientifically. Where Christians differ with Hawking is with his assessment that "there is no heaven or afterlife." He said, "that is a fairy story for people afraid of the dark." (Ibid). Is he right?

If that's what Christianity is, then a small group of disciples in the first century were able to pull off the greatest hoax in history just because they were afraid of dying.

They were in fact afraid, very afraid, after Jesus was crucified on a cross. They were afraid of suffering the same fate he suffered, death by crucifixion. So, they gathered together and hid. That was a natural reaction to a very real threat.

However, it was Jesus' resurrection that brought them out of the dark and into the light.

Once they met the resurrected Lord, their fear of death subsided. They believed that the same gift of resurrected life that God gave Jesus, would be given to them.

They preached Christ crucified and resurrected at their very peril. No one could shut them up because they knew what was on the other side of death, which was new life.

If there is no heaven, as Hawking says, then there was no resurrection. The Apostle Paul wrote this to the church at Corinth.

“If there's no resurrection, there's no living Christ. And face it—if there's no resurrection for Christ, everything we've told you is smoke and mirrors, and everything you've staked your life on is smoke and mirrors. Not only that, but we would be guilty of telling a string of barefaced lies about God, all these affidavits we passed on to you verifying that God raised up Christ—sheer fabrications, if there's no resurrection.

¹⁶⁻²⁰ If corpses can't be raised, then Christ wasn't, because he was indeed dead. And if Christ weren't raised, then all you're doing is wandering about in the dark, as lost as ever. It's even worse for those who died hoping in Christ and resurrection, because they're already in their graves. If all we get out of Christ is a little inspiration for a few short years, we're a pretty sorry lot. But the truth is that Christ *has* been raised up, the first in a long legacy of those who are going to leave the cemeteries.”

At death, most people seem to believe in heaven or at least hope there is one. Not everyone, but the percentage seems to go up.

But In case you haven't noticed, not all people live as if they are trying to get there.

If you don't want to go to heaven, there isn't much I can do to help you. But if you do, this is what I can tell you.

Heaven is a gift. We cannot earn our way to heaven.

Yet there are decisions this life is over.

As we live with Christ within us, we see evidence of his power and light within a dark world.

We live with the promise that life which begins with Christ here will continue after we die.

We have very little understanding of what that life will be like. I have far more questions than I have answers.

However, I know that we will in some way be like the resurrected Lord.

The things that bind our earthly bodies now will no longer bind us in heaven.

In his Revelation, the Apostle John saw this:

“I saw Heaven and earth new-created. Gone the first Heaven, gone the first earth, gone the sea.

² I saw Holy Jerusalem, new-created, descending resplendent out of Heaven, as ready for God as a bride for her husband.

³⁻⁵ I heard a voice thunder from the Throne: “Look! Look! God has moved into the neighborhood, making his home with men and women! They’re his people, he’s their God. He’ll wipe every tear from their eyes. Death is gone for good—tears gone, crying gone, pain gone—all the first order of things gone” (John 21:1-5)

I find it interesting that many scientists that cover a wide field of disciplines from astrophysics, geology, exoplanet science, planetary science, chemistry and various subfields of biology can study the area of life beyond planet earth in a very serious way, looking for any signs of life beyond earth, but not many entertain the possibility that God has already created life earth.

Christians call it heaven.

A little child once asked me where heaven was and I responded, “It’s where God is.”

Perhaps heaven is on a real planet so deep in space that it could never be discovered by the reaches of human discovery.

I think our jobs as Christians are to try and create a little bit of heaven right here. We were taught by Jesus to pray, “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

We are supposed to be trying to bring about some heaven on earth. That’s difficult since we’ve never been to heaven. But Jesus came from there. Through his life and teachings, he taught us about the Kingdom of Heaven.

I realize I’ll never be as smart as a Stephen Hawking. In his mind, he concluded that the universe could create itself from nothing. He never proved this, but he tried. He had to try because it’s the only way he could make sense of this universe without believing in God.

Once you begin with God, that God created a universe from nothing, then this God could certainly give us life beyond death.

If God can give us life beyond death, then such a God should be able to dictate how we ought to live.

It seems to me that if I were to believe as Hawking wanted me to believe that the universe created itself out of nothing, that would require a lot of faith. I believe he was more a man of faith than he professed. His faith was just in his scientific theories and not in God.

“Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we cannot see.” (Hebrews 11:1)

So where is your faith? Are you confident enough in where you are putting your faith to trust your life to it and also your eternity?

Faith is like taking the first step on a set of stairs even if you don't see the whole staircase. (<https://philosiblog.com/2012/08/04/take-the-first-step-in-faith-you-dont-have-to-see-the-whole-staircase-just-take-the-first-step/>)

It looks like a child closing her eyes and jumping off a table into her parent's arms.

It looks like zip lining across a canyon so deep you can't see the other side.

It looks like Moses' mother placing her child in a tar-pitched basket in the Nile River in hopes he would be rescued and not killed by Pharaoh.

It's like going into surgery, believing you are going to wake up and be headed toward healing.

I can't see heaven, but I can feel Jesus. Because I can feel Jesus through his Holy Spirit, that is my guarantee that heaven is real.

Heaven is a promise and is something we look forward to beyond this life, but heaven is not the reason Christians follow Jesus.

In fact, if the only reason Christians served Jesus is because of a heavenly promise we cannot see, faith would be a burden.

Instead, we are liberated by faith because faith is about the journey.

Faith is about the relationship we have with the resurrected Lord.

Faith is about knowing Jesus personally, and living life through his Spirit so that we can love others and make this world a better place. In this way, we come to have joy, peace, and purpose.

So where do you stand today? Are you living as if the resurrection of Jesus never happened?

You are if Jesus means nothing to your daily life. You are if Jesus doesn't change the way you spend your money, your time, or how you interact with people. You are if you never pray. You are if God is not a personal God. You are if you know that our sins are forgiven. You are if you don't feel Jesus in your life through his Holy Spirit.

If Jesus means nothing to you now, don't expect Jesus to acknowledge you before God when you die. If his resurrection doesn't mean anything to you now, heaven should not mean anything to you when you die.

This Easter is a time for you to decide about Jesus' resurrection and yours. God will give you a new body. Don't worry about how. Just accept that the God who formed you will do it again.

You can stand with those who believe that heaven is a fairy story for people afraid of the dark, or you can exercise faith and meet the risen Lord who will keep His promise and give you the gift of His Holy Spirit and show you the light.

Today, I'm asking you to come and pray a simple prayer. God of heaven and earth. I want to go to heaven when I die. But more than that I want you help me live every day free of guilt; free to love you with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength; free to love others as I love myself; free from sin because I have confessed my sins and you have forgiven me; and free to use my gifts to make this world look more like the heaven that you have gone to prepare for us. I confess that the Resurrected Jesus is my Lord and Savior and invite Jesus, through his Spirit, to lead, guide, and direct my life. Amen.

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