



AFTER DEATH — WHAT THEN?

Rod Rutherford

Have you ever wondered what happens immediately following death? Most of us have thought about this at some time or other. There is a story in the New Testament which supplies us with much information about what happens immediately following death. This story was told by Jesus. It is recorded in Luke 16:19-31.

The story tells about two men. One man was very rich. He had everything that he desired. The other man, Lazarus, was very poor. He was sick. He lay at the gate of the rich man's house and begged for the scraps that fell from the rich man's table.

After a time Lazarus died. The rich man also died. Just as there was a great difference in life between the two men so there is also a great difference in death between them. However, the situation is now reversed. Lazarus was ***"carried away by the angels into Abraham's bosom."*** But the rich man ***"lifted up his eyes being in torment."*** There are many very valuable lessons which we can learn from this story. One lesson is that wealth, power, and social position do not extend beyond this life on earth. The rich man had all of these and yet he went to a place of torment. Lazarus had none of these things in this life. Yet he was in a place of happiness after death.

Another lesson is that consciousness continues beyond the grave. Some think that when one dies he is simply unconscious until the resurrection. This is not true. The body sleeps in the grave. The soul does not. Memory also continues beyond the grave. The rich man was fully conscious. He recognized Lazarus. He remembered that he had five brothers back on the earth. He was concerned about them and begged Abraham to send Lazarus back to preach to them so that they would not come to the place of torment where he was.

Many fathers and mothers after death will remember their children and how they failed to teach them about God when they had the opportunity. They will long for someone to teach them so that they will not come to be with them in torment. Many will remember with deep regret the opportunities they had to prepare for death while on earth, but did not take advantage of them.

Still another lesson that Jesus taught in this story is that after death, there is no second chance. The rich man begged for Abraham to ***“send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue”*** but Abraham refused. He pointed out that ***“there is a great gulf fixed”*** and that none could cross over it.

God has given us the time that we have on this earth so that we can prepare for death, ***“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance”*** (2 Peter 3:9). But once death comes, it is too late! There are only two possible places to go when we die. There is the place of the blessed where Lazarus went. This is the place where God’s faithful children go to await the resurrection and the Judgment. There is also the place of torment where the rich man went. This is the place where people go at death who have taken no thought for God and for doing His will during their lifetime on earth.

What about you? Are you prepared for death? Life on earth is uncertain. We have no assurance that we will live to see tomorrow. Death is certain. The Bible warns, ***“Come now, ye that say, Today or tomorrow, we will go into this city, and spend a year there, and trade, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. What is your life? For ye are a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away?”*** (James 4:13,14).

The Bible also says, ***“Behold now is day of salvation”*** (2 Corinthians 6:2). Begin today while there is time. Believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God (John 8:24). He alone is ***“the way, the truth, and the life”*** (John 14:6). Only through Christ can we be saved eternally (Acts 4:11,12). Repent of all your past sins (Acts 17:30,31). Confess your faith in Christ as the Son of God (Acts 8:37). Be buried with Him in baptism to have your sins washed away (Romans 6:4; Acts 22:16). Then serve Christ faithfully in His church for the rest of your life and you will be blessed throughout all eternity. ***“Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life”*** (Revelation 2:10). ***“Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing”*** (2 Timothy 4:8).