

Will We See Our Loved Ones Again? - Part One

by Charles E. Wigg

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A series of excellent articles from the pen of a servant of the Lord, who was greatly used of God in a past generation, appeared in an email programme recently. This has moved me to put down a few thoughts, and to offer them to you for the consideration, and comfort of my brothers and sisters in Christ.

I am sometimes been asked this question after a funeral, or when a loved one is nearing the gates of heaven. It is always a joy to be able to answer with an emphatic yes. Of course this yes is conditional upon both we and our loved ones having accepted God's offer of mercy and salvation. The fact that we have been born to 'Christian' parents, or even that we have been baptized as babies, or even adults. The fact that we have been confirmed, or have been in the fellowship of a Church or Assembly, does not guarantee us a place in Heaven with Christ. He said, "If ye believe not that I am HE, ye shall die in your sins", John 8:24, & 8:21, "Where I go you cannot come". It is sad to think that there are so many, that live ungodly worldly lives, that have no time for God or for His Son, or for His word, yet they think that they have a perfect right to enter heaven when they die. Such will find out when it is too late how mistaken they have been. Jesus said, that "no man cometh unto the Father but by ME" John 14:6.

But the believer in Christ knows that their sins are forgiven, and that the Lord Jesus whom they have received as their own Savior, has entered heaven as man, and gone their as their representative. They have the assurance from His own lips, recorded in His word, that when they die, they will go to be with Him, and that when absent from the body, they will be present with the Lord. John 14:3, 17:34, 2Cor. 5:8. Death should hold no terror for the believer in Christ, because such will never have to die in their sins, but they will die in Christ. It is true that it will involve parting from those that they love here, and that parting is always sad, but more so for those that remain here. We are not told not to sorrow, but we are told not to sorrow, "as others who have no hope", 1Thess. 4:13. But for the one who 'falls asleep in Jesus', there is no sorrow, no parting. The very moment that they part from their loved ones here, they join their loved ones there, those who are already 'with Christ, which is far better', Phil. 1:23.

There is a cult that teaches that once a person dies, all becomes black for them and that they lapse into a state of perpetual unconsciousness. This cult takes a text out of its context, to support their hopeless theory, and that text is found in Eccl. 9:5, "The dead know nothing". The purpose of this verse is to encourage us to use the opportunities presented to us in this life. Now is the time for learning, now is the time to buy up the opportunities, to serve the Lord whom we love, and to witness to the lost and perishing around us. Now is the time for us to learn all that we can of the scriptures, and of eternal things, because there is no learning in heaven. The let us redeem the time, for surely the days in which we live are evil. Col. 4:5, Eph. 5:16.

The story that the Lord Jesus told in Lukes Gospel chapter 16, clearly reveals the state of consciousness of those that depart this life, whether they die in Christ, or die in their sins, (verse 19-31). Some will dismiss this story as fact by claiming that it is like the parables, it is only just a story used by the Lord to illustrate what was on His mind. This is proven wrong by the fact that one person is named in the story. Lazarus the beggar was a real person that experienced these miseries. The rich man too was a real person, though his name is not given. The reason for this lies in the fact, that though there could only be one Lazarus, yet there have been many that have followed the example of the rich man. Especially in our day when material affluence is everywhere; predominantly in the West, but also even in third world countries, such as India.

This story clearly shows that death is not then end, and that after departing this life, there is another life, and an even greater, more vivid state of consciousness. The lot of Lazarus in this life was indeed miserable. It seems that his only friends were those that carried him daily, and laid him at the gate of the rich man. Other than this his only friends were the street dogs that licked his sores, thereby keeping them clean. His only diet was the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. But that miserable life had an end. But through the things that he suffered, he was taught to trust in God. He received a faith that the rich man never had.

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It was not his earthly misery that gained him a place in the bosom of Abraham, a place of comfort and rest. It was his faith and trust in God, our Heavenly Father. Poverty has no virtue, and it alone will never cause anyone to gain a place in Heaven. We read in Hebrews chapter 11 of those that "died in faith", and Lazarus was one of those. But though his miserable life on earth could be measured by years, the life that he entered after death had no measure, it was eternal.

The moment he breathed his last, he immediately gained another and another state of even greater consciousness. Though his limp and lifeless body lay on the dirt outside the gate of the rich man, yet his spirit and his soul were transported by the angels into a place of rest and comfort, 'the bosom of Abraham'. It is supposed that his poor old body was buried, but we are not told that it was. Where he was buried, and how he was buried, or who buried him did not matter. God knows where his body lies, and He will raise it up in the last day. But it will not be raised in the same state as it was buried, but it will be changed, and will shine as the firmament, Daniel, 12:2-3.

There are some that claim that unless your body is buried in some sacred, consecrated place, then you cannot enter heaven. I recall leading a 90-year-old blind lady to the Lord near Trivandrum, Kerala, India. She had been a Roman Catholic all her life. The nuns and priests did not rest until they had taken her from her daughter's house; (the daughter was a believer). They then began to work on her fears and superstitions, telling her that she must come back to the church. If she did not do so, then she could not be buried in their cemetery, and if she was not buried there, then she could never go to heaven? But this passage proves, that it does not matter what happened to the old body, it is the decision that a person makes to repent of their sin, and to put their faith and trust in Christ as Savior, that gains for that person the gift of eternal life.

Though the rich man's life was one of endless partying, and though he lived in luxury on this earth, yet he also found time to die. We are told that he was buried. Perhaps he had a very expensive coffin; maybe his body was laid in a marble mausoleum? Yet it did not matter, because during his life of plenty, he felt no need of God, or of faith and daily trust in Him. Death did not end his state of consciousness either. Because the moment his eyes were closed in death, he became conscious of being in another place. To his eternal regret he discovered immediately that he had his feelings. Though his body was buried with much ceremony, and perhaps many friends attended his funeral, yet now he seemed to have another body. He had eyes, he had a tongue and perhaps what was worst, he had his memory. During his earthly life, he never felt any need of God. He never had the time, or the desire to think of life after death. He never thought of taking the precious gift that God offered him. But now he had all eternity to curse himself for his folly. He had all eternity to regret his stupidity!

You may ask, 'Why are you saying these things?' My point is that if the rich man saw and recognized Lazarus reclining in the bosom of Abraham, then it is doubly sure that we will see, and we will recognize our loved ones when with them in the Glory! I have exposed the misery of the departed soul of the rich man, lest any un-saved person should read these words. With a longing that they may wake up, before it is too late.

We need to bear in mind, that this event took place before the Lord Jesus died, was buried and rose again. When He did, He led captivity captive. He led out those spirits of just men, now made perfect, into another better place, where they await the final completion of the plan of God. Now Paradise is no longer down, it is up. Eph. 4:9-10, 2Cor. 12:2-4. Now everything is different for those that die in Christ. We will deal with this in due course.

To return to our passage, we notice that the rich man prayed when in Hades. Hades is the unseen world of the dead. It was in two parts, one place a place of blessing and rest, the other a place of torment and suffering. The Lord when telling this story made it clear that the place of blessing was visible from the place of torment. How the once rich man, must have cursed himself, as he remembered his past life. Cursed himself for his cold-hearted lack of compassion towards his suffering fellow man! He never thought of praying during his earthly life, but he prayed now. But his prayer was too late, and it was addressed to one that could not help. What a warning!

As we have mentioned earlier, he lifted up his eyes, he had eyes. He had a mind, he could think. He had a voice, he prayed to Abraham. He recognized Lazarus, whom he had seen many times, laying in misery at his gate. But

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he also recognized Abraham, whom he had never seen. Though alone now in his misery, yet he did not want his brothers to join him in that place of torment. Here is a warning for those that pray for their dead relatives, and pay others to say masses for the repose of the souls of their dead relatives. You are wasting your time and money. If only you knew it, if your relatives have died in their sins, then they too are suffering in Hell, and are praying for you, that you will not join them there.