

Of Living Dogs and Dead Lions



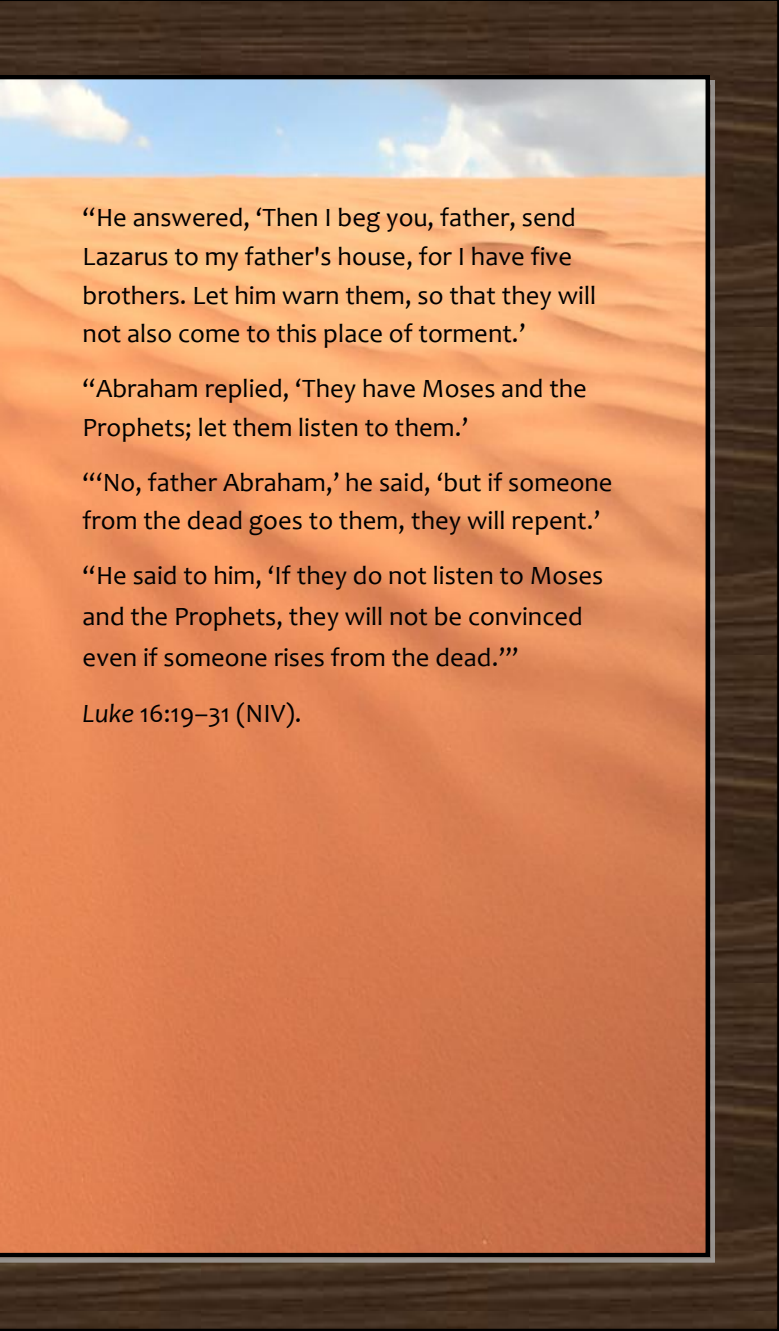
Is there life after death?

A strange story

“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.

“The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.’

“But Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.’



“He answered, ‘Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father’s house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’

“Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.’

“‘No, father Abraham,’ he said, ‘but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’

“He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’”

Luke 16:19–31 (NIV).

Just a moment ...

Is that really a true story? No, it is not true. Jesus simply took the superstitious beliefs of His audience in order to direct their thoughts to an important point: there is a great chasm which cannot be overcome once we have died—no matter how much we might want to overcome it. It is in this life that we have to decide.



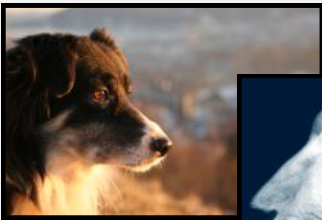
What happens after a person dies?

Of living dogs and dead lions

“But for him who is joined to all the living there is hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion. For the living know that they will die; but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten.” *Ecclesiastes 9:4, 5.*

In biblical times a dog was a scavenger—an animal that was despised. The lion, on the other hand, was a king—a majestic creature among the animals. But once dead, everything is over. Even a lion knows nothing; he can neither run nor eat, he can no longer see or feel anything. He is simply dead. Whereas a living dog can still do all of those things.

The same is true of us. Once we have died we are dead. No more thinking, no more actions, no more feelings—nothing more. Like a dead lion.



Then why did Jesus tell such a story?

An unpopular message

This is not a message that people like to hear. There are countless theories about what happens after death. And many people find comfort in these speculations. “Somehow, life will continue after death. It can’t simply all be over when we die.”

It was this very attitude and error that Jesus wanted to warn against. That is why He told the story of the rich man and poor Lazarus. There are two sides, and a great chasm between them that cannot be overcome.



Eve permitted herself to be deceived

The Bible gives us a brief report of how Eve was deceived:

“Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, ‘Has God indeed said, “You shall not eat of every tree of the garden”?’ And the woman said to the serpent, ‘We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, “You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.”’ Then the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not surely die.’” *Genesis 3:1–4.*

The serpent’s message was very simple: “You won’t die; things will continue as they are. Don’t worry.” What a terrible deception! Eve had to die physically, as every other person after her has had to die. And after that there was nothing more. Eve was dead.

“When it’s is over, then it’s over! That’s okay with me.”

A friend of mine once said to me, “I have lived my life. When I die then everything is over. That’s okay with me.”

Everything is over, as far as the great chasm that cannot be bridged is concerned—like that between the rich man and poor Lazarus. The decision for one side or the other has to be made during our lifetime. Death brings to a close the time for making decisions.

In this respect, my friend was right.

But that was not how he meant it.



“For the living know that they will die; but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, their hatred, and their envy have now perished; nevermore will they have a share in anything done under the sun.”

Ecclesiastes 9:5, 6

“His spirit departs, he returns to his earth; in that very day his plans perish.”

Psalms 146:4

But everything is not over: “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”

2 Corinthians 5:10. Even though we die, we will all be physically resurrected—some to everlasting life, and some to everlasting death. We will be able to think, feel, and act again. We will all see what decision we have made in life—for or against the good. And then the chasm will be dreadfully obvious to everyone.

The consciousness of the loss of everlasting life; the loss of everything that was dear and precious, will be unbearably painful to those on the rich man’s side.

The rich man in the story realized what he had lost, and he was filled with an inexpressible desire to be on the other side of the chasm. This desire did not stop—it was unquenchable and burnt in him like fire. This suffering will only be terminated by the second and final death. (See *Revelation 20:5, 6*.)

My friend did not realize that!

This error brings momentous consequences! God wants to protect us from them, which is why Moses prayed, “So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.” *Psalm 90:12*. In other words, “Lord, teach us that the days of our earthly life will come to an end, so that we will make preparation for eternity now.”



What is the chasm?

The chasm is the difference between the rich man and poor Lazarus. It is not their money, but their character. The rich man was not particularly bad—he may have even done many “good” works in his lifetime. He didn’t drive Lazarus away from his house. He permitted him to eat from his leftovers. But he lived for himself. He was not concerned with eternity. That is why he did not prepare for it. The needs of his fellow human beings did not lead him to change his heart. He was selfish, and he remained so. He chose to go this way.

Lazarus was poor. He was grateful for the scraps from the table of the rich. He did not complain against God because of his fate and the unrighteousness that exists between the rich and the poor. He prepared himself for eternity. His heart was full of love—even towards the rich man who had dealt so selfishly with all his goods.



The chasm can be overcome—as long as it's not too late

A young man once came to Jesus with a question. “Now behold, one came and said to Him, ‘Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?’ Jesus said to him, ‘If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.’ But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.” *Matthew 19:16, 21, 22.* This rich young man was not ready for eternity.

The rich tax collector, Zacchaeus, reacted very differently. “Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, ‘Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold.’” *Luke 19:8.*

Although despised, this man gave his heart to God and his fellow human beings. He let God change his selfish nature. He let God prepare him for eternity.

In the parable Jesus told, the rich man had made a decision during his lifetime—to live for himself. In the resurrection he will be raised with the same character that he had while on earth. He will see that all his decisions were egoistic. But at the same

time, he still wants to continue in his own way. If he had his time again, he would make the same choices. He sees that he has lost everything, but he does not want to change. The chasm cannot be bridged. The rich man suffers terrible agony.



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