

# Angels for Pallbearers

by Dr. Walter L. Wilson

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"And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; and in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments" (Luke 16:22, 23).

In this unveiling of the unseen, we find a graphic representation of many important truths. In this one message from the lips of our Lord, we find the answers to many of the false doctrines which are being taught today. The Lord Jesus knew that cults would spring up and that false prophets would arise, teaching errors utterly contrary to the mind of God. In this portion of God's Word, the Saviour draws aside the veil and gives us a glimpse into eternity, that we may know the truth concerning those things which lie beyond the portals of the grave.

As we go through the story, we shall ask questions and find the answers. No doubt you will find the answers to many questions that have arisen in your own mind.

The rich man, mentioned in verse nineteen, prepared well up to the grave. He bought fine garments to clothe his body, and splendid food to strengthen his body. No evil is recorded of him, nor any good. He lived without God. He rejected the Word of God, and he had no interest in the godly man at his gate.

In verse twenty, Lazarus is brought before us, lying in poverty and pain, with dogs for his companions. Here we learn that a wicked man may be wealthy, and that a saintly man may live in poverty. To belong to the Lord does not necessarily carry with it freedom from earthly distress. A righteous man may be wretched; a godly life may be lived in the midst of sorrow and pain.

## **Does Death End All?**

Death enters the scene in verse twenty-two. Death ends all things earthly for both the believer and the unbeliever. For the Godly Lazarus, it ended the company of dogs and brought the company of angels. It ended his lying outside the gate and began his living in the mansions of God. It ended the ministrations of the dogs and began the ministrations of angels.

For the rich man, death ended all his pleasures and began his pain. When God's longsuffering ended, the rich man's long suffering began.

Death ended his reveling in wine and began his eternal torment of everlasting thirst. Death ended his luxury and began his poverty. Death ended his comforts and began his curses. Death ended his singing and began his sighing. Death ended his mercies and began his miseries.

In verse twenty-three the question is answered, "Do the dead know anything, and will we know anything after death?" Neither Lazarus nor the rich man slept in the grave. Probably Lazarus was not even buried. Bodies such as his were often cast out for the wild dogs and wolves to devour. These men were conscious after death. They saw each other after death. They spoke to each other after death, and so the question is answered, "Are people obliterated after death, or is there a life after death?" Abraham had been dead many centuries, yet Lazarus and the rich man saw him and recognized him.

We find in verse twenty-four that the rich man who thought that he did not need to pray while he was living began to pray when he was dead. He did not pray to get out of hell, but only for some comfort while he was there. He had shut God out of his life, and, therefore, God shut him out of eternal bliss. He did not believe in showing mercy to poor Lazarus, but after his death he wanted mercy from both Abraham and Lazarus. He did not believe in missionaries while he was alive, but he wanted one sent to his brothers after he was dead.

### **Will God Punish Sinners?**

Sometimes the question is asked whether a good God will punish sinners. It is answered in this verse which reads, "And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame." The Lord has given us this answer to remove all doubts about it.

In order to convince us that there is no second chance for salvation after death the Lord gave us verse twenty-six, "And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence." If you fail to trust Jesus Christ, you will certainly go the way of the rich man to the place of suffering, from which there is no escape.

One church system has devised a plan or scheme whereby those who die in their sins may be taken out of the place of punishment upon the payment of certain sums of money. The verse that we are considering precludes the possibility of any such deliverance. Money is paid by the bereaved friends and relatives to those who will promise a certain

number of prayers for the dead. Those who receive the money promise to perform various religious exercises, including prayers, in order that the lost man may escape further torment. The Lord Jesus gave us verse twenty-six to refute such evil teachings.

There are those who make the claim that a living person may be baptised for the dead. It is taught that one who is still alive may become a Christian for and in place of a friend who has died unsaved. Their program is to have this living friend make a public confession of faith for the dead, and then to be baptised in place of the dead man. They claim that this performance is acceptable to God for the salvation of one that has died in his sins. Verse twenty-six shows us very plainly that such a program is utterly futile and worthless.

### **Can Sinners Be Saved After Death?**

There is no hope whatever for the salvation of that person who dies without Christ, and refuses the gospel of God's grace in this life. No comfort or hope is held out anywhere in the Scriptures for that one who refuses to obey the gospel and to receive the Saviour while he is living. To turn away from Christ now is to close the door eternally to heaven and to God. The rich man thought that his brothers could reject the Word of God, and still receive a blessing from God through a messenger of God from the dead. No such promise is made by the Lord. We are entirely dependent upon the Scriptures for God's message of salvation. There is no other way and no other plan. He that rejects God's Word in this life will be rejected by God in the next life.

Sometimes we hear of the living people praying for their dead. In verse twenty-seven, however, we find the dead praying for the living. This rich man had no interest in the spiritual welfare of his five brothers while he was living with them on the earth. After death he exhibited a deep concern. While living he did not care for the gospel message of Lazarus, but after death he realized that this message was what his brothers needed. During life he had made no effort to keep their souls from going to hell; but after death he vainly endeavored to bring salvation to them through Lazarus.

Lazarus received a wonderful compliment from the rich man. He lived such a Godly life in his wretchedness and rags, in his poverty and pain, that he commended himself fully to the conscience of this rich man. He was the one selected by the rich man to be a missionary to the five brothers. What a commendation that was, and what a tribute to his holy and excellent behaviour as a pauper! Have you any lost relatives who are praying for you? Are there those who loved you, who died in

their sins, and who are now pleading with God least you come to the place of torment where they are? You will notice that the five living brothers did not attempt to get their dead brother out of hell. There is a way to keep a man out of hell, but there is no way to get a man out of hell.

### **The Gospel in the Old Testament**

Another important question may be raised, "Is there enough gospel in the Old Testament to save the soul from hell?"

The answer is found in verse twenty-nine. Abraham referred to the Old Testament as a sufficient remedy for the five brothers. There is enough gospel in the Old Testament to reveal the way of salvation, and to bring the soul to God. Abraham had no doubt about the authorship of the first five books of the Bible. He should know, for he was living there with Moses. It is better for us to take the word of Abraham than the statements of so-called critics.

Another interesting question may be asked, "Do the dead know what we are doing on the earth?" Abraham knew that there was a Moses, though he died several hundred years before Moses was born. He knew that there were several prophets after Moses. He knew that these had written books. He knew that these five brothers had the books in their homes. He knew that these boys neither read nor believed those books. It is quite clear that at least one person in eternity knew what was happening here on earth.

The rich man had no faith in the Word of God. In verse thirty he utterly rejects the suggestion that his brothers would read their Bibles. Rather than the Scriptures, he prefers the return of one from the dead. He had more faith in the word of a dead man than in the Word of the living God. His rejection of God's Word caused God to reject him. Our Lord Jesus said in John 12:48, "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day."

We may ask the question, "Can the dead come back to talk with the living?" Christ's answer is, "No!" The reason is quite evident from the statement in Luke 16:31. We find that the Bible contains a clear and complete revelation of all that we need to know for time and eternity. What can a dead person tell us that is not already unfolded in the Scriptures? What information has God withheld from us that could be brought to us by a dead man?

In the Old Testament, four dead men were permitted to return to the

earth, but none of them brought any messages for our minds or hearts. In the New Testament, four dead men came back; also one dead woman, and one little girl; but none of these brought back any message concerning the things of eternity. God does not permit the dead to propagate His truth. The ministrations of His mercy are through living lips of those who love the Lord. No spirit medium has ever brought any new light on spiritual problems, nor any new revelations concerning the mysteries of death and of the life beyond.

Lazarus was not permitted to return, for God does not require His saints to work overtime. Lazarus had finished his work on earth and had gone to his rest. He was not permitted to return because he had no new message. Everything he had learned in eternity was fully described in the Book which was in the hands of those brothers of the rich man. God shuts us up to His Word. We must accept His Word or die in the dark.

The rich man lived for himself while on earth. His plans and desires while here came first. In hell he thought of himself first; he prayed for his own comfort first, and afterwards for his brothers. He did have some sense of justice in hell, for he requested only a drop of water from Lazarus. In life Lazarus had asked him for crumbs. In death the rich man could ask for no more.

### **Does Fire Consume the Resurrection Body?**

The unbeliever sometimes states that the fire would consume the unsaved man. The rich man did not think so. He did not say, "I am being consumed," but he did say, "I am tormented in this flame." Hell does not annihilate, nor destroy man's existence. The Lord gives us a picture of this truth in Daniel 3:25 "Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt." The sinner would like to believe that he is to be blotted out of existence, but this story proves convincingly that such is not the case.

The rich man had no interest in Abraham during his life time. After his death he found that Abraham had a very important place in regard to his soul. Abraham believed God, but the rich man did not. Abraham obeyed God; but the rich man disobeyed Him. Abraham loved God, but the rich man ignored Him. If the rich man had sought the God of Abraham and had exercised the faith of Abraham in the promises of God while he was living, he would never have been in hell. If he had cared for the teachings of Abraham on earth, he could have enjoyed the fellowship of Abraham in glory.

Let us refer again to the wonderful truth contained in verse twenty-six

which deals with the possibility of a second chance for salvation. This passage completely refutes such a theory. In John 8:21, the Lord Jesus said, "Ye . . . shall die in your sins: whither I go, ye cannot come." To die without a Saviour is to be lost forever. The rich man had no second chance, neither did he ask for it. You will notice that he did not request his release from hell, but only for a little relief from his suffering. He did not complain that he was being unjustly treated, but only desired a temporary release from his misery. He did not argue with God nor with Abraham about his punishment, but only sought for the salvation of his brothers. His prayers were made too late; his request fell on deaf ears; he might have prayed at an acceptable time, but he did not.

May the reader of these lines be warned by the message of our merciful Master, Jesus Christ, before it is too late. The Lord Jesus will save you from the fate of the rich man, if you in this life will believe His Word, receive Him as your Saviour, and trust in His precious blood, which was shed on the cross of Calvary for the remission and forgiveness of your sins.

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