

GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Returning to Our Roots

STUDY EIGHTEEN

An Interview with One from Beyond

Luke 16:19–31

When you attend the funeral of a believer, the body you see is going to be changed into a new kind of body that can endure eternity. The person's spirit is with the Lord. The person's body will be raised in the future.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

WE usually think of death in physical terms. A person dies when his or her body ceases to function. In the Scriptures, however, death can also refer to a person's spiritual condition. When Adam and Eve sinned, they cut themselves off from God, the source of all life—which resulted in spiritual as well as physical death. For the first time, sin entered God's created world and brought death "to everyone, for everyone sinned" (Romans 5:12).

Just as separation characterizes physical death when the soul leaves the body, so also separation characterizes spiritual death when the soul is cut off from God. People are dead spiritually when they are "without God and without hope" (Ephesians 2:12).

Those who die in their sins without God remain in that condition, separated from God for eternity. Jesus urgently warned people about the eternal consequences of unbelief. One of His most glaring warnings was in His story about the rich man and Lazarus, an actual account of two men who died—one saved and one unsaved—and their experiences in the afterlife.



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INSIGHT FOR LIVING
MINISTRIES

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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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1

An Interview with One from Beyond

Luke 16:19–31



PREPARE YOUR HEART

As you enter the realm of the dead through Jesus' teaching, pray for clarity and insight into God's compassion for the lost.

Father, You know people's hearts better than anyone, and Your offer of salvation is available to all people. Your divine love excludes no one, and You deeply desire everyone to be saved. I pray for insight into Your redemptive plan and the faith to trust the wisdom of Your judgments. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

In the context, Jesus had been teaching that no person can serve two masters, specifically, God and mammon—an Aramaic term for wealth (Luke 16:13). "The Pharisees, who dearly loved their money, heard all this and scoffed at him" (16:14).

In response, Jesus peered deeply into their souls and said,

"You like to appear righteous in public, but God knows your hearts. What this world honors is detestable in the sight of God." (16:15)

Jesus' teaching on the rich man and Lazarus followed as a rebuke to the proud and hypocritical Pharisees and a warning to all people whose hearts are hardened against God.



Observation: The Rich Man, Lazarus, and Abraham

While observing this passage, imagine yourself in Jesus' original audience. You see the Pharisees standing nearby, scowling, arms folded, and aloof. But you also see others sitting at Jesus' feet, receiving His words as water from an eternal spring. Think of yourself as one of those thirsty souls, drinking in every word Jesus said.



An Interview with One from Beyond

Luke 16:19–31

A Study in Contrasts—Luke 16:19–21

Jesus used contrast as a central communication tool in this message. How did Jesus contrast the rich man and Lazarus in *Luke 16:19–21*? Write down Jesus' descriptions.

The dogs licked Lazarus' sores while the rich man didn't even toss Lazarus the kitchen scraps usually thrown to the dogs. What was Jesus' point of irony?

An Analysis of the Afterlife—Luke 16:22–26

When the two men died, what did Jesus say happened to Lazarus, according to *Luke 16:22*? In what ways was Lazarus' afterlife opposite his earthly life?



An Interview with One from Beyond

Luke 16:19–31

What was the rich man's experience after his death according to *Luke 16:22–23*?

What did the pitiless rich man ask from Abraham in *16:24–26*? How did Abraham respond?

From Jesus' description of the place of torment in which the rich man languished, list the characteristics of hell that you observe.

There is a remarkable reversal of circumstances at death. Death is the greatest of all levelers. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



An Interview with One from Beyond

Luke 16:19–31

A Plea for Those Still Living—Luke 16:27–31

In his agony, the rich man thought of others perhaps for the first time. An odd sort of missionary zeal came over him when he considered the fate of his brothers. What did he ask Abraham in *Luke 16:27–29*? How did Abraham answer?

In *16:30–31*, the rich man pressed his plea. What did he request and how did Abraham answer?

The brothers represent the proud Pharisees who refused to repent and turn to God. Abraham seems to speak from the grave directly to them: “They won’t be persuaded *even if someone rises from the dead*” (16:31 emphasis added). What point was Jesus driving home to these hard-hearted hypocrites?



An Interview with One from Beyond

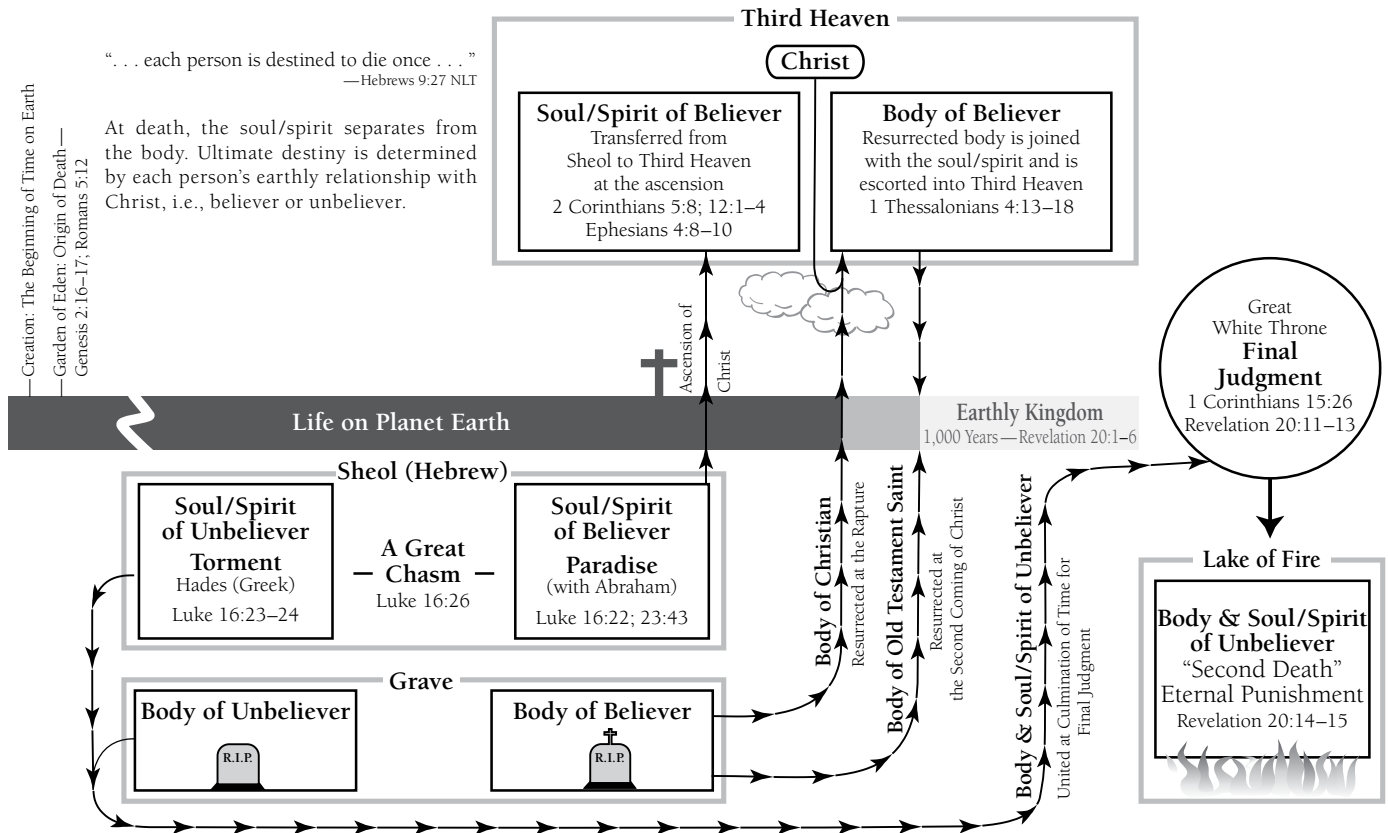
Luke 16:19–31

Even if we could bring someone back from the dead, we couldn't have as great an impact on the lost as we can by presenting the Scriptures to them. Jesus' message could be put into one sentence: Those who ignore the Word of God in life will not be ignored by the God of the Word in death. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: The Afterlife for the Saved and the Unserved

To set Christ's teaching against the larger context of Scripture, we've included the chart, "When People Die . . . What Happens?". Consult the chart as you probe the meaning of Luke 16:19–31.



An Interview with One from Beyond

Luke 16:19–31

The rich man and Lazarus are examples of those who died prior to the cross. The Old Testament referred to the place of the dead as *Sheol*. In faith, David declared, “You will not abandon my soul to Sheol” (Psalm 16:10). David believed that God would bring him to heaven, and at the Ascension, according to *Ephesians 4:8–10*, Jesus did just that for David and all the Old Testament saints.

Locate the section of the chart labeled, *Sheol*. In Sheol, the unsaved rich man was in “Hades” (Greek for *hell*), while saved Lazarus was in Paradise with Abraham. Find the arrows that illustrate the transfer to heaven of the souls of the Old Testament saints when Christ ascended into heaven.

After the cross, according to *2 Corinthians 5:8*, the souls of dead believers immediately go to heaven. What will happen to the bodies of Christians? Find the arrows illustrating Christ gathering His followers “in the clouds to meet [Him] in the air” (*1 Thessalonians 4:17*). At what point in the timeline of future events will this occur?

At the final judgment, unbelievers will be raised. What will happen to them, according to *Revelation 20:11–15*?



An Interview with One from Beyond

Luke 16:19–31

Based on your observations of Luke 16:19–31 and the chart, summarize what you've learned about the destiny of the saved and the unsaved.

The rich man was in literal pain. He was fully conscious. He had his senses, and he had his memory. He could see, hear, and taste. In addition, it was impossible to change his destiny. The chasm was fixed. No companionship exists in hell. There is an awful sense of loneliness. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Questions to Answer

Jesus' teaching on hell is serious and sobering, and it naturally raises questions. Let's correlate our passage with other Scriptures to find the answers.

How can a loving God send people to hell? The sad fact is that people choose hell by their disbelief. This question supposes that God might not care that people reject His offer of salvation. What does [2 Peter 3:9](#) reveal about God's true heart toward the lost?



An Interview with One from Beyond

Luke 16:19–31

What about those who have never heard the gospel? Paul offers insight into the answer in *Romans 1:19–20* and *10:14–17*. How does God reach out to all people, even those who reject Him?

What about deathbed repentance? Can an unsaved person turn to Christ at the last moment? Yes! What hopeful truth does *Luke 23:39–43* teach?

What about infants who die? David's words in *2 Samuel 12:19–23* upon the death of his child offer grieving families great comfort. How do you understand this passage?



An Interview with One from Beyond

Luke 16:19–31

Is reincarnation valid? Some eastern religions teach that our souls return after death in an unending cycle of death and rebirth. However, how does *Hebrews 9:27* counter this view?

A golden thread of God's compassion for the lost weaves through the Scriptures. God sacrificed His Son to save people from the consequences of their sin. All a person must do is accept His gift of grace through faith in Jesus to have "peace with God" and the promise of "joyfully looking forward to sharing God's glory" (Romans 5:1). "Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have God's Son does not have life" (1 John 5:12).

Someday, graves will open, and our bodies will be removed in a gloried state to be forever with Jesus. For the Christian, there is hope, wonderful hope. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Response and Result

Although it's unpleasant to think about hell, we must. Not until we honestly face the destiny of the unsaved will we truly comprehend the depth of God's love and appreciate Christ's sacrifice.

"Think lightly of hell," warned Charles Spurgeon,

And you will think lightly of the cross. Think little of the sufferings of lost souls, and you will soon think little of the Savior who delivers you from them.¹

Conclude this study by thinking *highly* of your Savior and thanking Him for your salvation. "Once you were dead because of your disobedience and many sins" (Ephesians 2:1). But Jesus bore the sin that would have condemned you. When you placed your faith in Christ as your Savior, God eternally united you with Christ and "forgave all your sins" (Colossians 2:13). Now you stand confident in God's grace, fully accepted in Christ.

Praise the Lord for His marvelous salvation and the hope of eternal life with Him!



An Interview with One from Beyond

Luke 16:19–31



A FINAL PRAYER

Use the space below to express your prayer of gratitude.

Father,

ENDNOTE

1. C. H. Spurgeon, *Spurgeon at His Best*, compiled by Tom Carter (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Book House, 1988), 98.

