

The Bible On Life After Death

Hello I'm Ian Arnold. Welcome again to The Swedenborg Program.

Last time I spoke of the findings of Drs. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross and Raymond Moody, both of whom have worked for years with patients who, after being revived from clinical death, have recounted what happened to them during the experience. I went on to talk of the book, "*Heaven and Hell*" written by Emanuel Swedenborg in 1758, and containing so much which bears out the reality of what these people described. Inevitably, questions arise about the relationship which such teaching bears to what is said on the subject in the Bible. I said that this week the talk would be about, "The Bible on life after death."

Astonishingly, people tend to think that the Bible says practically nothing about the life after death, and the Churches on the whole, tend to teach a 'wait and see' attitude. And even Dr. Moody, in the second part of his book, "*Life after Life*", where he looks at the Bible for possible parallels to the experiences his patients described, fails to mention what, at least as I see them, are some of the most significant of all things said there.

I want you, if you will, to quietly consider the following: Jesus said: "Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also." (John 14 :1-3).

As you think about these words ask yourself, what could Jesus have meant by His Father's house but some kind of higher life? These are very beautiful words. Full of promise and wonderfully re-assuring. Where Christ is, there we shall be.

But let us turn to another Gospel, this time it is Matthew, chapter 22. The Sadducees (who, by the way, did not believe in the resurrection or in survival after death) had been trying to trap the Lord, using a ridiculous example to try to make fun of the whole idea. At the end of this particular encounter with them, the Lord said these words: "[And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God, 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead, but of the living.](#)" ([Matthew 22: 31-33](#)). It's so easy for

us to miss the point here. Here was a group of people who stoutly denied the resurrection. As far as they were concerned, and though they revered the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, they were dead. Not so, said Jesus. God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. They are not dead. They are alive today. Though in the spiritual world.

And then we come to Luke's Gospel, to the description there of the crucifixion. One of the criminals crucified alongside Jesus railed at Him, it is said. The other defended Him and turned to Jesus asking him to remember him when He came to His Kingdom. And (Jesus) said to him, ["Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise"](#). They are startling words, aren't they? ["Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise."](#)

Even so, it by no means ends here. And this time I want to read with you a parable.

Now I know that some people dismiss the parables as illustrations, the accuracy and teaching of which can be questioned. Is it, though, likely that Jesus would have used something, inaccurate and fanciful, even though it only be in a parable? For myself I can't believe He would. In any case, listen to what He said. It is the [parable of the rich man and Lazarus](#), [Luke chapter 16, verses 19 to 31](#).

"There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, full of sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried; and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes, he saw Abraham afar off and Lazarus in his bosom. And he called out, Father Abraham, have mercy upon me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in anguish in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here and you are in anguish. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us'. And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, so that he may warn them, lest they

also come into this place of torment'. But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.' And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent'. He said to him, "If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if some one should rise from the dead." (Luke 16: 19-31).

Let me say again that though a parable, yet I believe - and a strong case can be made out to this effect - that the Lord was here drawing on essentially real life experiences as He did of course in His other parables. The sad thing, is that it has been neglected for the wealth of information it contains about life after death. Here, in fact, are just some of the points made.

The parable takes for granted that resurrection and awakening in the spiritual world follows on after death. Lazarus died and he was taken up into Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and found himself in hell. There is no suggestion of an interval of years. No mention of a last trump with which many have associated resurrection from the dead. The person goes on living though now in another realm. It's interesting also that the character people form for themselves in this world goes with them into the next. Death doesn't change people...it doesn't change us as to the person we really are inside. And this raises the whole question of the purpose of our life in this world.

Swedenborg explains that whilst the Lord wishes to ultimately bring us all into heaven and to bless our lives with heavenly happiness, yet we must choose this life ourselves. And that, in a very real sense, is why we are here. The kind of person we freely choose to be in this world, selfish or unselfish, greedy for ourselves or more considerate for the well-being of others, is the person we will remain. As the tree falls so it lies. And after death we shall take ourselves to people like-minded to ourselves and with whom we are happiest and most at ease. It is sometimes fondly thought and hoped that when we die we will change. We will be different people. We will get about doing the things and being the person we never got around to being here. But we won't. Once the surprise and novelty wears off, we will be our old selves once again. It's always the way.

It's worth dwelling on this for a moment. Another popular idea is that after death we will be called to give account of ourselves and will be judged and sent one way or the other whether we like it or not. But nothing whatever is said to this effect in the

parable. Lazarus died and went to heaven. The rich man died and went to hell. They took themselves there, to all intents and purposes. Their lives or the type of person they on earth had chosen to be, determined where they would go.

I remember an older friend of mine saying some years ago... indeed, pointing out the obvious... that in a hundred years from now everyone alive today, adults and children (with a few exceptions, of course) will be dead. And that wasn't said as some kind of doomsday forecast or in any morbid way. It is a fact. We are all going to die. And it's useful and healthy to talk calmly about the fact. But while the body dies and is discarded the mind or spirit within, which is the essential person we are, goes on living, just as the parable describes. And that doesn't mean some disembodied existence. Lazarus and the rich man were just as much people after death as they had been before. The rich man remembered his brothers. "After the death of the body" wrote Swedenborg, "the spirit of a person appears in the spiritual world in a human form, altogether as it appeared in the natural world." You may have noticed that at the end of the parable the question of communication with the 'dead' is touched upon. The rich man asked that someone be sent to warn his five brothers. Abraham replied, "If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if some one should rise from the dead." That is a topic well worth looking into and I am going to do so next week. The question of communication with spirits.

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