

One Minute After Death

A man dies—what then? This question must have come up at the first funeral in human history. The first man to look at death, which he himself had inflicted, must have looked at his brother's still form and asked the question burning in his conscience: Shall he live again?

We are not left to guess about this. God has pulled back the curtain for a glimpse beyond the grave, even giving us the conversation there.

"There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day:

And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.

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, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

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.

But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.

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.

Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house:

For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment.

Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.

And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.

And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead" (Luke 16:19–31).

The rich man woke up in a world where things are fixed. No longer could his money or influence accomplish a single thing. He woke up in a world where not one single desire would be granted. And to add to his misery, he had a haunting memory! He now realized that he had labored for the *"meat which perisheth."* He remembered his fine clothes and life's pleasures. Now, only one minute after death, a whole lifetime had turned into bitterness.

At last he saw truth, believed in God, believed in prayer, believed in heaven, believed in missionary and personal work—all of that—but too late! He had a new standard of values—but too late! He was in a world

where things are fixed. He cried out to have it changed, but it was of no use. He craved fellowship with the saved, but it was denied him because a great gulf is fixed! He realized that opportunity has value only in the earth life, and he cried out for someone to persuade his brothers in the land of the living, that they might seize that good opportunity of salvation before death brought them to where he was. Yes, now he believed in prayer, now he believed in preaching, now he believed in obeying the Lord—but too late!

The rich man had a new view of things one minute after death. Not only were things fixed, but fixed *forever*! The godly were carried into God's presence, blissfully conscious of enjoyment; he was carried into the devil's place, painfully conscious of his suffering. Everlasting thirst for even a drop of water would be indescribable suffering. Surely here was a man who would have been glad to believe in purgatory—but there is no purgatory. The gulf is fixed. He put himself beyond prayer and beyond hope, and eternally beyond help.

Friend, the value that you have set upon Jesus Christ at the moment of your death will be eternally fixed. If you shut Him out of your affections in this life, He will remain eternally outside after death. *"In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power"* (2 Thessalonians 1:8, 9).

Will you hear those awful words: "Son, remember"? Remember the sins, the wasted life, the scorn with which you mocked your faithful ministers and parents, the selfishness and greed that shut the door of heaven, the times you fought against the voice of the Spirit. "Son, remember"! Remember the prayers of the ones who sought to bring you into the grace of Christ. "Son, remember." Remember that Christ died on the cross in vain, so far as you were concerned. So hard and so worldly was your heart that you could not look upon the blood of redemption and be moved to action.

Will you be awakened too late? Will you see your own end too late? Son, remember: *"The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord"* (Romans 6:23).

—Harold Brenneman