

## In response to a Question about Luke 16:19ff The Rich Man and Lazarus Dr. Jerry Nelson

I would initially instruct people to make a careful distinction between the heaven ("Abraham's side") or hell ("hades") to which people are assigned upon death, at this time in salvation history (post Cross and pre - 2nd Coming), with the eternal state which includes the "new earth" and "lake of fire" after the resurrection. People tend to conflate all after-life into one state of existence which they tend to call "heaven" or "hell" with no thought to the difference between the disembodied existence that is ours (believer or unbeliever) upon death with the embodied existence that is ours (believer on the new earth and unbeliever in the lake of fire) after the resurrection. I think that distinction is important because it discourages popular ideas about the believer after death (and before the resurrection) walking, talking, seeing, playing, etc. (spatial and physical words that don't apply to a disembodied spirit).

I also resist much of what has been written about "heaven" now because it tends to minimize the eventual resurrection of the body. If I read Romans 8 (and other passages) correctly, the "blessed hope" (Titus 2:13) is not a rapture (pre, mid OR post tribulation) but is the resurrection of the body. All creation including the human spirit "groans inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our BODIES. For in this HOPE we were saved..."

We are told so little about the state of the believing dead, before the resurrection, that I hesitate to say more than we can say with certainty. Paul spoke of a disembodied existence at death when he wrote, "Away from the body and at home with the Lord." David took comfort at the death of his infant son by Bathsheba that "I will go to him, but he will not return to me." Those and other biblical references give us reason to believe there will be recognition and fellowship in some way even without spatial or physical categories.

For the above noted distinction between the disembodied intermediate state and the embodied eternal state, I'm with those who see Luke 16:19ff as a parable and not as a narrative of an actual event. And, as you know, trying to make a parable "walk on all four" creates misleading interpretations. The post-death but pre-resurrection separation ("chasm") of believers and unbelievers and the "comfort" which Lazarus experienced and the "anguish" (even if not physical) which the rich man experienced seem attested by other scriptures implicitly or explicitly. But bodies, eyes, fingers, tongues, flames, seem explicitly inconsistent with the teaching of scripture about the disembodied state of the dead, until the resurrection!

Bottom line, I think it is important to make much of "relationship" with God upon death (disembodied) which only gets better (embodied) after the resurrection and the new earth, and discourage the fanciful talk of physical and spatial pleasures in the intermediate state. The emphasis in our thinking is not about carnal delights (even fishing or golf) but about a nearness to our God that gave David and Paul such great comfort. At the same time I don't want to discourage an understanding of the very physical/space world and bodies that will be ours after the resurrection. Hence my desire to have people make a clear distinction between going to heaven now and what will be after Christ returns.