

ETERNITY

A TALE OF TWO MEN



TONY EVANS

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Jim had been serving in the army since the beginning of the war. Day in and day out, the fighting continued. Jim grew weary of the battle and found himself sickened by the bloodshed and despair.

One day, Jim and his troop were digging foxholes. They expected an avalanche of enemy artillery that night and needed the protection. As Jim climbed into his little trench in the dirt, he thought to himself, “My life is so miserable!”

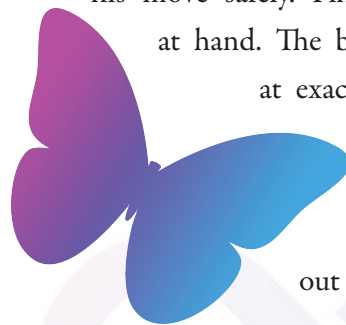
No sooner did the sun begin to set then, as predicted, the sky lit up with explosives. Jim sat in his foxhole, despondent.

Then, out of nowhere, Jim noticed the prettiest thing he had seen in months. Pretty colors—green, blue, red—flickering around his foxhole. It was a butterfly, lit up by the glow of shells exploding nearby. In that moment, Jim forgot his misery and became transfixed on that butterfly. A smile of joy and wonder came over his face as he stared at this beautiful creature, so out of place in this middle of all the death, destruction, and ugliness.

Suddenly, it occurred to him, “If I could just grab hold of that butterfly, I could carry that beauty around with me. I’d have something to comfort me when life gets especially miserable.”

Jim carefully laid out a plan. He knew exactly where the butterfly would have to land for him to make

his move safely. Finally, the moment was at hand. The butterfly touched down at exactly the right spot. His palms glistened with sweat as he inched up cautiously and reached out his hands.



Just as his fingers were beginning to close around their catch, they went limp. The butterfly fluttered away. Jim slumped down in the foxhole, shot dead by an enemy sniper.

The story of Jim and his butterfly is tragic, but it makes a sobering point: reaching out for the beautiful things of life can be costly. In fact, some of the “butterflies” in this life can cost you eternity.

Luke 16:19-31 tells us the story of a man who paid that price. In fact, it gives us a glimpse at both sides of the hereafter.

We’re told about a certain rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen (very expensive threads!)

and lived in luxury every day. Now, here was a guy who was the envy of everyone. If he were living in modern times, he'd have a Beverly Hills address. His 10,000 square-foot house would be surrounded by manicured lawns and shimmering swimming pools. His staff would attend to his every need. In his driveway, you'd find an exquisite Mercedes-Benz—for use only when the Rolls Royce was in the shop, or for commuting back and forth to the Lear Jet. This man was rich beyond imagination and didn't mind letting everyone know it.

The text also tells us about another man—a beggar named Lazarus. Quite the opposite of our rich man, Lazarus depended completely upon others for his very survival.

Not only was this man poor, he was sick. His body was covered with open sores that wouldn't heal. His wounds were too infected to close. Besides, the dogs would pass by each day and lick them. Yes, it's a disgusting picture—human misery at its worst.



Poor Lazarus couldn't even beg without help; he had to be laid at the gate of the rich man's home. This was evidently a place with a good deal of foot traffic. After all, you can't beg where there are no people. But Lazarus had another agenda. We're told that he longed to be fed with the crumbs that fell from

the rich man's table. In other words, Lazarus had probably made a contact with a servant from the rich man's household. "Listen, when you take out the garbage, pass by me," he might have said. "Leave the scraps by the gate—they'll be my dinner." Now, that is poor!

Eventually, the two men died. Now, don't miss the significance of that short statement. Both men died. Time has a way of doing that to people—and no one is exempt. The fact is, you are going to die. It doesn't matter how far you jog or how carefully you balance your diet, you are going to die. It makes no difference how healthy you feel, where you live, how much you earn, or who your doctor happens to be. Sooner or later, your time, like mine, will come.

Looking back to our story, the death of the rich man certainly made the headlines. The passing of such a powerful man must have sent ripples through the entire community. Can you imagine the crowd at his funeral? I can almost picture a line of shiny Cadillacs led by a team of motorcycle officers moving traffic to one side!

Lazarus, on the other hand, was likely dropped into a ditch and covered over with dirt.

Nevertheless, make no mistake—despite the enormous differences between them, both men were equally dead.

Sometimes, recognizing the certainty of death can turn into a morbid obsession. It can paralyze some with fear and plunge others into depression. Such people have missed the point! Becoming aware of

our mortality should serve as an incentive to keep our attention focused on eternal goals and values. It reminds us that when our earthly life concludes, our eternal life begins.



You see, death is not a period at the end of life's sentence. It is a conjunction, linking time and eternity. The issue at hand is this: how does the sentence read after the conjunction?

A tombstone in a 100 year-old cemetery bears this verse: "Pause, stranger, when you pass me by. As you are now, so once was I. As I am now, so you will be. So prepare for death and follow me."

An unknown visitor added these lines: "To follow you, I'm not content, until I know which way you went!"

It is at this very crossroads that our story takes an interesting turn. Upon Lazarus' death, God dispatched some angels to escort him to the bosom of Abraham. Was this the result of his poverty? No. Because of his suffering? No! It was the fruit of his faith. You see, the name "Lazarus" is a derivative of the name "Eleazar," which means "God has helped."

When Jesus told this story of a man named Lazarus, He was not simply describing a man who was poor and sick, but a man whom God had helped.

"Some help," you might say. "He was broke, sick, totally dependent...and God didn't even protect him from the dogs! What kind of help is that?"

Jesus wasn't talking about physical deliverance; He was looking deeper. Inside that body of infected flesh was a man whom God had visited in faith. His life in this world was a tragedy, but he knew much about the world to come. Lazarus was a man who knew God.

But what about the rich man? What did his affluence accomplish? We're told that no sooner had he closed his eyes in death than he found himself being tormented in hell. No purgatory, no "sleeping in the grave," no second chances, no options.



Then, the former rich man did an amazing thing. He looked up and saw Abraham, far away in heaven, comforting Lazarus. There is a remarkable revelation packed into those few short words. You see, the man had eyes—his own eyes. He had a mind—his own mind, with memories and senses intact.

When we die, the essence of life God puts within us (called the soul) is extracted from the body that can

no longer function. At that point, it seems that God transplants our soul into some new frame that, in many ways, is similar to our body. This new frame can see, speak, think, feel...it possesses a physical reality.

Want to know how real that reality is? The rich man cried out, “Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in agony in this fire” (Luke 16:24). The man is on fire, but he is not burning. All the water in all the oceans couldn’t douse those flames. Even so, he begged for the touch of a wet finger as though it would make an eternal difference.

And that’s not all. The misery of hell is not only what you feel, but what you see. The rich man had a clear view of heaven. Can you imagine the torture of seeing heaven, but being unable to get near it? How devastating to see friends, loved ones—even enemies—celebrate in the presence of the Lord while you languish in timeless torment!

No wonder the man cried out for pity. Unfortunately, all the sympathy in the world could not help him. Abraham explains, “Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us” (Luke 16:25-26).

Why did God put a “Grand Canyon” between heaven and hell? Why is it that after 20,000 years of torment, you still can’t bridge that gap? Why is it that after a million years, you can’t get a transfer?

Think back to the book of Genesis. Remember the Tree of Life? When Adam and Eve sinned, they were put out of the Garden. Angels with flaming swords were posted at the entrance to ensure that Adam did not find a way to get in and eat from that tree. Had they done so, unregenerate Adam and Eve would have gained access to heaven, and all of heaven would be contaminated by sin. Obviously, a sinless God could not allow that to happen. He had to block the door to guarantee it. So, a chasm has been established. When you die, you wind up on one side of that abyss forever.

The rich man is now hopelessly stuck on the wrong side.

He’s left with his affliction...and his memories.

“Remember...” Abraham said.

In hell, you remember where you went wrong on earth. And the details will be quite specific. You might be reminded, “Think back to



the evening of September 16. You sat in church and heard about a life-or-death decision. You realized that your life was finite, and that a choice must be made between heaven and hell. You felt My spirit tugging at your heart, urging you to get right with Me. You said, ‘Another day.’ People begged you to come to Christ, but you said, ‘Later.’ Well, later has finally come. Now, it’s too late.”

The rich man finally realized that his fate was sealed. At that point, his thoughts turned to his loved ones still on earth. “I beg you, father,” he said, “send Lazarus to my father’s house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment” (Luke 16:27-28).

I have heard people say, “I don’t mind going to hell—that’s where all my friends will be. It’ll be one big party!” Oh, if you could hear from them now. There are no parties, no good times, no friends. There is no love, no peace, no comfort—just screams for mercy. How would you react if you could hear their warnings?

Abraham responded to the rich man’s plea: “They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.” The rich man knew that his brothers, like himself, had shrugged off the warnings of Scripture. “No, father Abraham,” he said, “but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.” Abraham knows better. “If they do not

listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead” (Luke 16:29-31).

“Send a miracle.” That’s all we want—irrefutable, tangible, visible proof that God is who He says He is. Doesn’t that seem logical? I hear it all the time when witnessing to people: “If God will _____ (fill in the blank), then I’ll believe!”

The truth is, our lives are jam-packed with miracles and we still don’t believe. The intricacy of the human body is a miracle, yet we turn a blind eye toward abortion. The working of the universe is a miracle, yet scientists fail to see the hand of God, clinging instead to a ridiculous theory claiming that nothing plus nothing becomes something.

In John 11:38-44, another man named Lazarus actually does come back from the dead, resurrected by Jesus. Did the Jews repent? On the contrary, they wanted to put Lazarus back in the grave and began to plot Jesus’ death as well.

As it turns out, Abraham was right. If a person will not listen to the Word, no miracle in the universe will be enough to make him

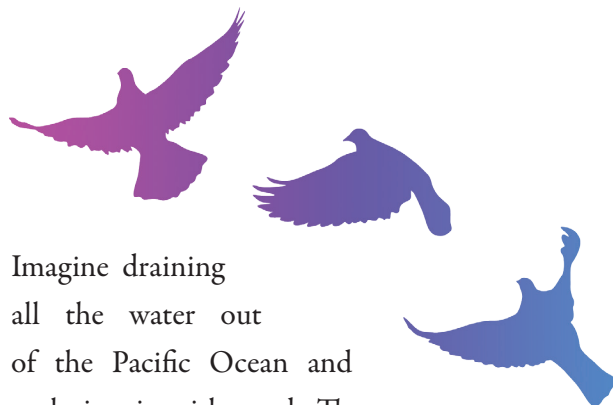


believe. Let's look back at what the Word tells us: God's Word declares that man's eternal destiny depends on what he does with Jesus Christ. His Word tells us that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that He became a man, and that He suffered on the cross, died, and rose again to save us from hell. The Word teaches us that as a bee loses its sting, so death lost its sting when it stung Jesus Christ. The Word proclaims that all who come to Christ by faith can live.

Make no mistake. What kept the rich man out of heaven was not his wealth. Nor did poverty alone earn Lazarus a reward. Each had made a choice to believe or not to believe. Each of us faces that same choice.

Because we have the freedom to choose Christ, there is no reason for any human being to go to hell. Still, hell remains our destination until the moment we make the decision to place our faith in Jesus Christ as our personal substitute, trusting Him alone for the forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life which He promised to give freely to all who come to Him for it.

No other decision in life deserves more attention than this one. Our choice affects not only our life on earth, but our eternal future. And forever is a long, long time.



Imagine draining all the water out of the Pacific Ocean and replacing it with sand. Then build that sand pile higher and higher until it is as tall as Mt. Everest.

Now, picture a bird that flies in every 5,000 years and carries away one grain of sand each trip. When the bird finally returns for the last grain of sand, one second will have ticked by in eternity.

Deuteronomy 30:19-20 says, "I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him."

Take a cue from Lazarus. Choose life by trusting the Lord Jesus Christ as your only Savior from sin.



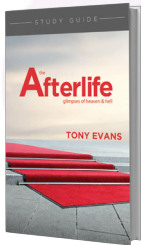
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THE URBAN ALTERNATIVE

The Urban Alternative (TUA) is a Christian broadcast ministry founded over 30 years ago by Dr. Tony Evans. At TUA, we seek to promote a kingdom agenda philosophy designed to enable people to live all of life underneath the comprehensive rule of God. This is accomplished through a variety of means, including media, resources, clergy ministries and community impact training. The Urban Alternative's daily radio broadcast airs on over 1,000 radio outlets in America and in over 100 countries worldwide. Find us online at TonyEvans.org.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Tony Evans is the founder and president of The Urban Alternative, a national ministry dedicated to restoring hope and transforming lives through the proclamation and application of God's Word. For over three decades, Dr. Evans has also served as senior pastor of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship in Dallas. He is a prolific author of numerous books, including the best-selling Kingdom Man. His radio program, "The Alternative with Dr. Tony Evans," is heard daily on over 1,000 radio outlets. Dr. Evans is also the chaplain for the Dallas Mavericks and former chaplain for the Dallas Cowboys.

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