

In a previous post I talked about the very funny satirical dialogue of the second-century pagan Lucian of Samosata, “Voyage to the Underworld” in which an unbelievably wealthy tyrant became incredibly miserable after death, because he realized that all his power, influence, and massive wealth had been stripped from him, and would be, for all eternity, whereas a poor cobbler who had lived a miserably impoverished existence was rather pleased that he no longer would starve and freeze nearly to death ever again.

The point of the dialogue is pretty obvious. If you are deeply attached to the material things of this life, you are courting your own disaster. That’s not what you should be living for.

At about the same time as Lucian was writing an anonymous Christian author produced a book known as the Acts of Thomas. This is the first legendary account we have of the apostle Thomas, famous for (allegedly) being the first missionary to take the gospel to India. Unlike the work of Lucian, the account is not meant to be at all funny, even though it does have its amusing moments. One of the episodes is particularly germane to my current interest in the developing Christian views of the afterlife.

The merchant who had purchased Thomas as a slave and brought him to India brings him to to a local king...

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