

# Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus

During Christ's ministry He often spoke about sin, sinners, judgment, suffering, perishing, heaven and hell. On one occasion, Jesus told Nicodemus that if he believed in Jesus Christ (John 3:16) he would not perish but gain eternal life. Later in John 8:24, He told a crowd that unless they believed that "I am He," that is He is God, they would die in their sins. In Luke 5:32, Jesus said that He came to call "sinners to repentance." With that comment He revealed that repentance will accompany saving faith. Later He repeated the statement, "unless you repent, you will all likewise perish" to make the same point (Luke 13:3, 5). Jesus was very clear that we must repent and believe He is God. Jesus also connected saving faith with submission to Himself as Lord on numerous occasions (Matthew 7:21-23; Romans 10:9-13). You see, eternal life is not praying a prayer and then remaining in control of your life. Jesus was very clear about that. Repentance and submission to Him accompany saving faith. Jesus promised, "I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish" (John 10:28). Our study is from Luke 16:19-31 which is about two men: a beggar named Lazarus and an unnamed rich man. The beggar went to heaven but the rich man went to hell. As you read the study, look for some unexpected truths about heaven and hell.

**THE RICH MAN.** There are some who believe that the account about the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31 is a parable; others believe it is an historical account. Whatever viewpoint one holds, the message is the same. Why would Jesus lead us astray into believing something that was not true? The account starts with a man. While we are never given his name, we are told that he was rich and dressed in exquisite clothes.

Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day. Luke 16:19 (NASB)

Purple clothes were the clothes worn by people of nobility and high rank. The reason is that the purple was extremely expensive. It was extracted from the murex shellfish or sea snail found in the eastern Mediterranean

Sea.<sup>1</sup> In New Testament times the purple linen clothing was a status symbol. That is the reason we are given a description

of the color and fabric of his clothes. This man not only was dressed in expensive clothes, he also enjoyed life every day. We are also told that he habitually dressed like this.

The Greek word for dressed is in the imperfect tense which reveals that he was constantly dressed in purple. The Greek word for "joyously" is *euphraino* which has the idea "to make merry." It is also a present participle which means that he was constantly merry. He enjoyed life all the time.

**LAZARUS, THE BEGGAR.** Verse two introduces us to the second person in the parable who is Lazarus.

And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, and longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores. Luke 16:20-21 (NASB)



Immediately, we are told that Lazarus was poor. The Greek word for "poor" is *ptochos*. This word refers to someone who has nothing. Someone who is in extreme poverty. There is another Greek word, *penes*, that refers to someone who at

1. D. Van Elderen. "Purple." The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible. Zondervan Publishing. 1977. vol. 4. p. 960.

least has something, but that word is not used here. This reveals that Lazarus was destitute. Therefore, whatever clothes he wore or food that he ate were gifts from someone or he had to find them. He was a beggar. We are told that he lay at the rich man's gate that led to the entrance of the home. The description implies a very expensive home. It appears that Lazarus was paralyzed and so he lay there begging for money. Why he chose the rich man's home is unknown. We are also told that Lazarus had sores on his body. The Greek word for sores is *helkoo*. It has the idea of ulcerated sores or sores that are embedded into the skin.

This poor man was so hungry that he was not hoping for steak and potatoes. He was just hoping for any crumbs that would fall from the rich man's table, and dogs were licking his sores. In ancient days that was not a good thing since more dogs carried worms. Since the Jews considered dogs to be disgusting scavengers (1

Samuel 17:43; 24:14; 1 Kings 14:11; 16:4; 21:23-24; Psalm 22:16; Proverbs 26:11; Philippians 3:2; 2 Peter 2:22; Revelation 22:15), this reveals that Lazarus was greatly neglected by the rich man. The Greek verb tenses are very dramatic in these two verses. They reveal that Lazarus was in a very bad condition. When we are told that Lazarus was covered with sores, the Greek word, *helkoo*, is a perfect participle. It reveals that he had been in this condition for a long time. When we are told that he was longing to be fed, the Greek verb, *epithumeo*, is a present participle which implies a continual state of hunger. When we are told that dogs were coming and licking his sores, the Greek verbs imply that this

was occurring again and again. It is a very dramatic scene. This poor man was lying at the rich man's gate, longing for just crumbs.

**LAZARUS AND RICH MAN DIE.** In verse 22 we are told that both Lazarus and the rich man died.

Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom. Luke 16:22-23 (NASB)



What is striking about Jesus' parable is that Lazarus was never buried but the rich man was buried. Lazarus is treated in the same manner as Enoch or Elijah. Hebrews 11:5 tells us that Enoch "was not found because God took him up." He was taken directly to heaven just as Elijah was taken directly to heaven in a chariot (2 Kings 2:11). But the rich man died, was buried and ended up in Hades.

When we are told that an angel took Lazarus to Abraham's bosom, we must not assume that angels take Christians to heaven. While the concept is popular today and some people have claimed that they have seen angels just before they die, there is no support for this view elsewhere in the pages of Scripture. The concept only occurs here in this parable.

Likewise, the reference to Abraham's bosom only occurs in this parable. Abraham's bosom, in this parable, is a symbolic name for heaven and only occurs in this parable. One

of the rules for good biblical interpretation is to always look for other biblical passages that confirm an interpretation. But we cannot find any other passages that confirm angels carry people to heaven. Therefore, we must be careful to avoid stating that this is always the case.

When Jesus says “Abraham’s bosom,” He referred to a concept that the Jews believed, even though they were wrong. The non-biblical, pseudepigraphical book “4 Maccabees” refers to Jews dying and being received by Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and by their forefathers praising them. Notice that Abraham is one person in paradise who will receive the Jews. Abraham is the most important person from a Jewish perspective.

Great is the ordeal and peril of the soul that lies in wait in eternal torment for those who transgress the commandment of God. Let us then arm ourselves with the control over the passions which comes from divine reason. After our death in this fashion, Abraham and Isaac and Jacob will receive us, and all our forefathers will praise us.<sup>2</sup>

It is also important to notice that the rich man saw Abraham. Therefore, we should understand Lazarus as being next to Abraham as opposed to inside of Abraham.

Another important point is that in the Old Testament the place of the unrighteous dead is usually called Sheol. However, Sheol was contrasted with heaven on three occasions (Psalm 139:8; Isaiah 7:11; Amos 9:2). In the New Testament Sheol is replaced by the term Hades, which usually refers to the abode of the unrighteous dead. The reason that it only refers to the location of the unrighteous dead is that 2 Corinthians 2:6-8 and Philippians 2:23 reveal that when a Christian dies he or she goes immediately to heaven to be with Christ.

Finally, we are told the rich man “lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom.” Even though in this parable Lazarus and the rich man can see each other, we must not think that those in heaven and the lake of fire can see each other. Revelation

20:14 states that the lake of fire is the eventual abode of Hades. Most likely Jesus wanted them to see one another in the parable because the Jews incorrectly believed that hell and paradise were close together.

The Jews believed that Gehenna and Paradise were close together. This detail in the parable does not demand that we believe it.<sup>3</sup>

**REALITY OF HELL.** In the last section we have taken the time to learn some historical background information about Jewish beliefs in order to avoid doctrinal errors. The information is also important in order to understand how this affected the Jewish leaders which is the real purpose of this parable. It is the major application. Other applications will occur throughout the study.

Our next verse is Luke 16:24. The rich man cries out to Abraham and pleads for help.

“And he cried out and said, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.’” Luke 16:24 (NASB)

The primary message of this verse is that the rich man is suffering in Hades. This teaches us that while Hades is the place of the unrighteous dead, it is also a place of tremendous suffering. Since the parable is adjusted to Jewish beliefs, Jesus is able to teach several critical points.

Some teach that when the unrighteous die they cease to exist. These proponents cannot imagine that God would let anyone suffer for eternity. They claim that only God is eternal (1 Timothy 1:17). Sadly, they ignore Jesus’ clear teaching in Matthew 25:46 that everyone will exist for eternity too! The only question is where will they exist? Therefore, the question is, “Where will you live?” Jesus said . . .

These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life. Matthew 25:46 (NASB)

2. James H. Charlesworth, ed., “4 Maccabees. 13:15-17.” The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, trans. H. Andersen (Hendrickson, 2013), vol. 2, p. 558.

3. A.T. Robertson, Luke. Word Pictures in the New Testament. Baker Book House. 1930. vol. 2, p. 223.

Notice that Jesus describes only two options. He does not give us a third option of ceasing to exist. Our spirits will continue living after death. We will either suffer for eternity (Mark 9:47-48; 2 Thessalonians 1:9) or be able to enjoy life for eternity (Daniel 12:2). Jesus' parable and other passages of Scripture clearly reveal that the unrighteous, those who reject Christ, will go to Hades or hell which will eventually be thrown into the lake of fire for forever (Revelation 20:14). Additionally, the demons and Satan will suffer for eternity in the lake of fire (Revelation 19:20; 20:10). Other New Testament passages reveal that the unrighteous will suffer in darkness (Matthew 5:18), feel the hot brimstone (Revelation 19:20; 20:10; 21:8) and will suffer due to the fire (Matthew 5:22). Matthew 22:13 and 25:30 tell us they will weep and gnash their teeth in Hades, hell or the lake of fire.

Notice in the parable the rich man pleads for mercy. Then he explains he is begging for mercy.

He says, "I am in agony in this flame." In fact, he is so miserable that he asks Abraham if Lazarus could just "dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue." Historical records teach us that some people have been tied to a wood pole, stake or tree and then burned alive. We can only imagine their horrible suffering, since most of us at some time have been burned by a hot stove or hot oven. Second and third degree burns cause terrible pain. Eventually, those burned at the stake die. Jesus warns us and the parable

reveals that the pain due to the fire and brimstone will never stop (Jude 7) and our spirits will never die (Mark 9:47-48).

... are exhibited as an example in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire. Jude 7 (NASB)

**RICH MAN WAS NOT A BELIEVER.** Therefore ask yourself, where are you going to live for eternity? The rich man surely did not influence God favorably with his wealth. He

went to hell because he had rejected God. There is only one way a person can escape eternal punishment. It is by believing that Jesus Christ died for our sins and returned to life as proof He was God in human flesh. When people realize that they are going to hell because they are sinners and believe Jesus can forgive their sins, they will repent of their sins, confess their sins, plead for forgiveness and submit to God. People are not forgiven by just adding Jesus to their



life as if He was another toy or acquisition. There used to be a plaque at the Mission San Xavier del Bac, Tucson, Arizona that read as follows,

With the coming of the Christian missionaries, the desert people added tenets of the new faith to their religion of nature. This faith was expressed using symbols of metal, embroidered cloth, carved wood, and painted canvas.

That is, these native Americans added Jesus to their list of other gods. Jesus was not truly their God. Jesus said repeatedly that if we do not love Him more than anything else, we are not worthy of Him (Matthew 10:37). We must deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Him (Matthew 16:24). The rich man never did that.

**WE REAP WHAT WE SOW.** After the rich man had asked Abraham to allow Lazarus to drop water on his tongue, Abraham told him that would not happen.

*But Abraham said, “Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony.” Luke 16:25 (NASB)*

What reason did Abraham give to the rich man? Notice the principle Abraham gave him. The principle was a simple one. The rich man should have known it since Micah 6:15-16 states that the unrighteous do not reap blessings in the future. The message is obvious and clear. Hell is not a place of comfort, parties with friends, golf, and sexual orgies. The unrighteous can expect only torment. Earlier Jesus also taught that the more evil the unrighteous commit, the greater their punishment will be. Stop and think. The suffering was so bad for the rich man that he would have been happy to have had just a drop of water land on his tongue. But Lazarus was enjoying heaven, not because of any good deeds that he performed. As a result of trusting in Christ for the forgiveness of his sins, Lazarus was enjoying eternal life.

**NO SECOND OPPORTUNITIES.** Then Abraham gave the rich man another reason why Lazarus could not bring him some water. Once a person dies, he or she cannot crossover from hell to heaven.

*“And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us.” Luke 16:26 (NASB)*

Hebrews 9:27 warns us that after death we are judged and sentenced. Those who have rejected Christ in this life are

going to hell which is also called the lake of fire.

*And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment . . . Hebrews 9:27 (NASB)*

And Abraham tells us that at death the decision is final. After death our destiny cannot be changed. There is a story told of an attorney who was told that he was going to hell because he did not believe in Christ. The man quickly replied that if he discovered after death that God existed, he would negotiate with God and get into heaven. This true life event is a sad one. He did not understand that after death he would not be able to change his destiny. Once in hell, people stay in hell. Once in heaven, who would want to go to hell?

**HOW PEOPLE RESPOND.** Then the rich man thought about his family and begged Abraham to send Lazarus to warn his family.

*And he said, “Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father’s house — for I have five brothers — in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.” Luke 16:27-28 (NASB)*

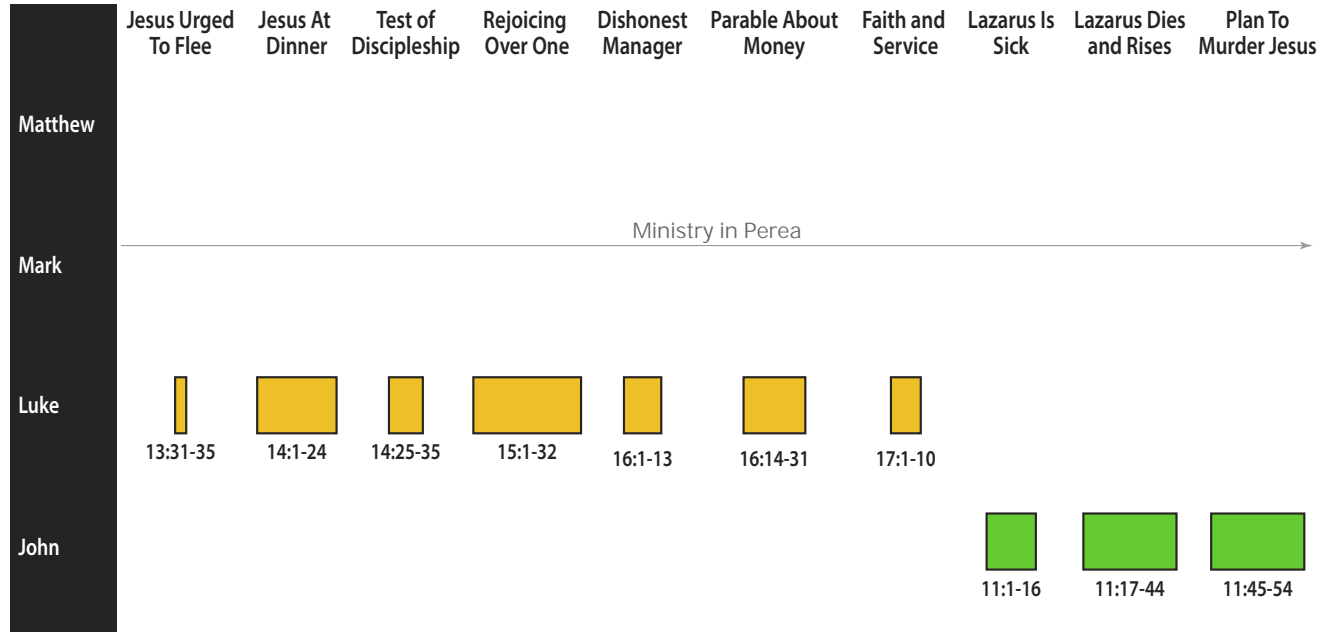
It is important once again to see that hell is a place of suffering. The Greek word for torment is *basanos*, which refers to “severe pain due to torture or pain.”<sup>4</sup> That is, the lake of fire is the punishment for rejecting Christ. This punishment is deserved because even proud sinners who understand that Jesus Christ died for their sins ultimately reject Him. They have insulted the Lord who suffered in their place, not to mention the fact that hell is what they deserve because of their evil behavior and attitudes — rebellion against God. Notice the rich man called it a place of torment. Hell is not a place to party with friends or play golf every day. Alcohol will not be served by the demons and Satan. The demons and Satan will themselves be suffering along with everyone else in hell; just read Revelation 19:20-21 and 20:10.

The rich man wanted to warn his five brothers. This reveals he was a “good” man from the world’s perspective.

<sup>4</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 286.

# Life and Heart of Jesus

Ministry In Perea - Fall of A.D. 32



He had a sense of morality that God has written into our conscience (Romans 2:14-15). He responded to that internal set of principles. This helps us understand that those who will be in hell will understand their serious error of rejecting Christ. They will live with regret for the rest of eternity. Imagine the people who will realize that they have rejected their God. In hell they will finally understand that they deserve every second of punishment. It might seem unfair to some now; but in the end, they will finally understand.

**SEND SOMEONE FROM THE DEAD.** Then Abraham told the rich man that Lazarus would not be visiting his brothers because his brothers would not believe even someone who came back from the dead.

*“But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ But he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!’ But he said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.’” Luke 16:29-31 (NASB)*

If they refuse to listen Moses and the Prophets, that is the Old Testament, they will not listen even if someone was raised from the dead to bring them the salvation message. People do not automatically turn to God because of some sensational event. When Christ walked this earth, very few believed in Him. He performed miracles and signs and yet the disciples had trouble believing He was God. Mark 6:51-52 tells us that Jesus rebuked the disciples after He had walked on the water because they had not learned the true message from the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand. What message did you learn from the account of Jesus feeding five thousand men, not to mention the women and children? Did you learn that God loves us? Did you learn that God will provide for us? Did you learn that Jesus could do miracles? What lessons can you learn? If we read Matthew 14:33, we discover that the disciples should have learned, not about some personal benefit, but that Jesus was God. John 6:26-27 reveals that the people who were at the feeding of the five thousand missed the message too! They concluded Jesus would provide them food and happiness.

Therefore, they wanted to make Him king (John 6:15) and then searched for Him. They were and we are so consumed with ourselves that we fail to see God.

The Scriptures speak of Christ (John 5:39). The rich man failed to see Jesus. Did he read the books Moses and the prophets wrote? Did he read the entire Old Testament? One wonders if he did. Was he too busy hoarding his money and storing up treasure here on earth?

**CONCLUSION.** For those who have read the Old Testament, we discover there are many prophecies about Jesus Christ that promised He would be born in Bethlehem. He would die in the year A.D. 33. A forerunner would come before Him and He would heal many. One of His disciples would betray Him; all of them would abandon Him. He would be beaten, despised, mocked, and die a horrible death. The prophetic description described a death on a cross. The prophecies describe His resurrection. He was God in human flesh. All of this the rich man would have found if he had studied the Scriptures diligently. But the rich man valued his wealth more. We can only assume that Lazarus understood the truth about Christ since he was in Abraham's bosom.

What was the purpose of this parable? Did Jesus want to give us a nice story for our children? The answer is no because the parable was given to adults—to the crowd surrounding Him. What was the purpose of the parable? The purpose of this parable was to teach the religious leaders, the crowd and all of us that after death we cannot change our destiny. We are either sentenced to eternal life or eternal punishment. Even more significant is that the wealthy can go to hell and the extremely poor can go to heaven. The Pharisees believed

the wealthy were favored by God. For them wealth was a sign of God's approval. They believed their wealth would help them to gain God's favor by giving money in order to earn salvation. The parable teaches that money does not help a person go to heaven. In fact, Jesus pointedly said,

**“Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony.” Luke 16:25 (NASB)**

You must ask yourself why do you believe you are going to heaven? Most people think they are going to heaven because they are a good person. Few believe they are going to hell. It is obvious that the rich man thought he was going to heaven too! It is obvious that his five brothers thought they were going to heaven also, or the rich man would not have wanted Lazarus to warn them. Abraham makes it clear that salvation is found in the Bible. It speaks of Christ and how we can be saved from hell.

**You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me . . . John 5:39 (NASB)**

The testimony of the Bible is that salvation is only found in Christ by believing in Him. True faith in Christ includes admission that we are sinners, repentance from our sins, believing Christ died on the cross in order to forgive our sins and returned to life and then to submit to Him. So, where are you going?