

The Parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man

By David L. Antion, Ph.D.

Do “saved” parents hear the cries and pleadings of their unsaved children being tortured in hell fire? Could a parent endure an eternity of see their unsaved children being tormented in hell fire and not be able to help them? Is this what Jesus meant when He gave the parable of the rich man and Lazarus?

Why do so many ministers, preachers, and even some scholars make an interpretation of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus that brings fear, pain and mental anguish to so many people (Luke 16:19-31)? According to their interpretation, people in heaven can see and hear people in hell. And the people in hell can cry out to parents and loved ones in heaven.

Most parents would say, “I would prefer to suffer in place of my child.” Or “I’d rather be sick instead of my child.” The bond that between mentally-healthy parents and their children is almost unbreakable.

Imagine your unsaved child – regardless of age – being tortured and tormented in hell. Could you as a parent endure the tortured cries of your son or daughter? According to the common interpretation of this parable, you would not be able to give them so much as a drop of water!

The parable says there is a barrier or “gulf” fixed. Based on an erroneous interpretation parents would have to spend eternity watching their children suffer but not be able to help them.

Why would Jesus, a loving Savior, give a parable with such a heartless meaning? And why is it that so many ministers and preachers make such a devastating interpretation of this parable?

Would this be paradise for the saved if they could see people being tormented for all eternity?? No. It would be torture! But, thank God, that is NOT what Jesus’ taught and not what a loving God has in store for those who are saved!

PRINCIPLES OF BIBLE STUDY

A parable is a story used to illustrate a teaching. Jesus used parables both to teach and to hide meanings. Understanding a parable requires the reader to use the correct principles of Bible study as they are applied to parables. Every serious Bible student knows or should know these principles:

1. It is improper to use a parable to establish Bible doctrine.
2. Parables are teaching stories generally illustrating just one principle or point.
3. Any ambiguous statements in the parables must be interpreted in the light of the plain Bible scriptures on that same subject.
4. It is an error to push the literal interpretation of the parable in every detail.

Here's an example of what would happen if we interpreted a parable literally in every detail. An good example is the **parable of the unjust (unrighteous) judge** found in **Luke 18:1-8**.

Verse 1 tells why Jesus gave the parable – to teach people that they should not lose heart but continue to pray under all circumstances. In this parable a widow is appealing to an unjust judge, who is hardhearted and fearless, to avenge her against her enemies. Though he fears no one, not even God, he granted the woman her petition saying, “because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, lest by continually coming she wear me out” (Luke 18:5 NAS).

In verse 6 Jesus said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge said; now shall not God bring about justice for His elect, who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them?" (Luke 18:6-7 NAS). Another translation of verse 7 reads: "God's chosen people cry out to him day and night. Won't he make things right for them? Will he keep putting them off?" (*New International Revised Version*).

Jesus plainly made the connection between the unjust judge and God. If we press this parable to the extreme we would conclude that God is unjust or unrighteous! That flies in the face of many Scriptures about God. God is just, righteous, slow to anger and filled with mercy (see Exodus 34:6; Jonah 4:2;

Psalm 103:8). God is even called “the righteous judge” by the Apostle Paul (2 Timothy 4:8).

A MISUNDERSTOOD PARABLE

The parable about the rich man and Lazarus is probably the most misunderstood of all Jesus’ parables. It has been used time and again to scare people about hell fire and the sufferings following death. Those who interpret this parable – spoken by Jesus in the 1st century A.D. -- try to make it fit with later teachings about hell that appeared in the 14th century!

As a result, it has frightened sincere people who thought that, while saved, they would be forced to watch their unsaved loved ones being tormented for eternity. Church leaders also quote this statement from the parable to show that mothers can do nothing to change the situation or help their loved ones: “There is a great chasm fixed, in order that those who wish to come over from here to you may not be able, and *that* none may cross over from there to us” (Luke 16:26 NAS).

What kind of eternal bliss can saved parents have if they have to hear the screams and view the torments of their unsaved children for all eternity?? Is this God’s reward to those who have accepted Christ??

Does this parable in Luke 16 verses 19-31 really say the things that so many churches teach?

ORIGINS OF A FICTICIOUS HELL FIRE

The first thing we need to consider: Is there an ever burning hell fire? Is this the punishment for the unsaved? Is this what the Bible teaches?

The popular idea of hell has come from the work of Dante Alighieri entitled *The Divine Comedy*. Written in the early 1300’s A.D., it was a large poetic comedy poking fun at people who did various evils. Originally its title was simply, “Comedy” but another poet tacked on the word “Divine.” Note that this was *more than 1200 years* after Jesus and all His original apostles died.

The poetic work was written in 3 stages – the “**Inferno**”, the “**Purgatory**” and “**Paradise.**” Dante wrote it in the first person. In this fictional story Dante is guided by the Roman poet, Virgil, through hell and purgatory. Dante’s ideal woman, Beatrice, guides him through paradise.

Dante Alighieri’s writing was considered a masterpiece of Italian literature and one of the world’s great pieces of **poetic fiction**. It was meant as comedy and fiction, but church leaders used its lurid descriptions of sufferings to terrorize their members into conformity and loyalty to the church. Threatening people with eternal hell fire has done little or nothing to keep them moral and upright.

ASSUMPTION OF AN IMMORTAL SOUL

An underlying assumption about the teachings of heaven and hell is that there is an immortal soul in humans. Some mistakenly teach that soul is somehow released from the body at death and goes either to heaven or to hell or to a purgatory of sorts. But Jesus plainly said, “No man has ascended into heaven...” (John 3:13).

The surprising truth is that the Bible does not contain the phrase “immortal soul.” In fact, the very word translated “soul” is defined in your Bible as something mortal.

When God created man and breathed into his nostrils, man then became a “living soul” (Genesis 2:7 and 1 Corinthians 15:45). The Hebrew word translated “soul” is “nephesh.” It means a living being and is used of humans and as well as of animals. In Genesis 1:20-21 it is translated “creature” – used in reference to creatures in the sea and on the land.

After Adam and Eve sinned God said this to them: “For you are dust, and to dust you shall return” (Genesis 3:19 *NAS*). Before they sinned, God warned them that in the day they took of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil they would surely DIE. (“For the wages of sin is death...” (Romans 6:23 *CSB*). But Satan, disguised as a serpent, (see Revelation 12:9) lied to the woman and said, “You will not surely die” (Genesis 3:4).

Immediately after rebuking the man and his wife, God blocked the way to the “Tree of Life” putting cherubim with swords to guard it. Why? Here is the

answer: "...lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever" (Genesis 3:22 KJV). If the man was created with an immortal soul inside him that would live forever – he would have already had what the "tree of life" offered. But God told him that he was made from dust and to dust he would return (Genesis 3:19).

PLAIN SCRIPTURES REGARDING HUMANS AND DEATH

Do you have an immortal soul? According to the New Testament only one person has immortality – that is Jesus Christ. Speaking of Jesus Christ, Paul wrote, "He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, **who alone possesses immortality** and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. To Him *be* honor and eternal dominion! Amen" (1 Timothy 6:16 *New American Standard—Updated*).

You and I are waiting for immortality. Paul wrote in the First Epistle to the Corinthians that, "this mortal must put on immortality and this corruptible must put on incorruption..." (15:53).

The Bible refers to death by the analogy of sleep. Writing about the resurrection from the dead Paul wrote, "Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I shew you a mystery; **we shall not all sleep**, but we shall all be changed" (1Corinthians 15:51-52 *NAS, emphasis mine*). Notice that we cannot inherit God's kingdom as mortal humans made of flesh and blood just as corruption cannot inherit incorruption.

The mystery is that we will be changed. But, how? Through the resurrection from the dead. Paul wrote, "So also is the resurrection of the dead. It (our body) is sown a perishable *body*, it is raised an imperishable *body*; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual *body*"(1Corinthians 15:42-44 *NAS*).

What did Paul mean, "It is sown"? We are sown in death as a perishable and corruptible body. But those in Christ will be raised a spiritual body in honor, glory, and power!

Because we, as flesh and blood, cannot inherit God's kingdom (1 Corinthians 15:50). We must be changed. But, when? How?

Here is what Paul wrote: "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this **mortal must put on immortality**. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory" (1 Corinthians 15:52-54 *NAS emphasis mine*).

From what Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, we know that the last trump is the return of Jesus Christ. "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have **fallen asleep in Jesus**. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of *the* archangel and with the trumpet of God, and **the dead in Christ** will rise first" (1 Thessalonians 4:14-16 *NAS emphasis mine*).

Notice that Paul uses the term "fallen asleep in Jesus" and then equates it with "the dead in Christ." Also note that Jesus will come with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God (the last trump) and His arrival signals the resurrection from the dead.

Jesus Himself said, "Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which **all who are in the tombs (graves) will hear His voice**, and will come forth; those who did the good *deeds to a resurrection of life*, those who committed the evil *deeds to a resurrection of judgment*" (John 5:28 *NAS, emphasis mine*).

This is what Paul talked about when he said that in Christ all will be made alive but every person in his/her own order. That is, there is more than one resurrection. The first one is for those who are in Christ. See Revelation 20:4-5.

WE NEED THE RESURRECTION BECAUSE ALL HUMANS DIE

Here's what we see as the fate of humans as written in Ecclesiastes **3:19-20**: "For the fate of the sons of men and the fate of beasts is the same. As one dies so dies the other; indeed, they all have the same breath and there is no

advantage for man over beast, for all is vanity. **All go to the same place. All came from the dust and all return to the dust**" (*NAS emphasis mine*).

Here we have a plain, direct statement that humans and beasts have the same fate in this mortal life. They both go to the grave and their bodies return to dust. That is the fate of man without the promise of God for the resurrection. We read this: "And just as people are **appointed to die once**, and then to face judgment" (*Hebrews 9:27 New English Translation, emphasis mine*).

From the Psalms we read this about us humans: "But man in *his* pomp will not endure; he is like the beasts that perish" (*Psalm 49:12 NAS*).

In Ecclesiastes 9:5 we read, "For the living know that they will die, **but the dead do not know anything**; they have no further reward— and even the memory of them disappears" (*New English Translation, emphasis mine*).

Isaiah 38:10-11 reads, "I said, 'In the middle of my life I am to enter the gates of Sheol (grave, underground); I am to be deprived of the rest of my years.' I said, 'I will not see the LORD, the LORD in the land of the living; I will look on man no more among the inhabitants of the world.'" (*NAS*)

Here is Psalm 146:4: "Man's breath goes out, he is turned back again to dust; in that day all his purposes come to an end" (*Bible in Basic English*).

Another statement from Psalm 30:9: "What profit is there in my blood, if I go down to the pit? Will the dust praise You? Will it declare Your faithfulness?" You and I cannot praise God from the grave because we are asleep in death.

Here is another translation of Psalm 30:9: "What profit is there in taking my life, in my descending into the Pit? Can the dust of the grave praise you? Can it declare your loyalty?" (*New English Translation*).

Psalm 115:17 says: "The dead do not praise the LORD, Nor *do* any who go down into silence" (*NAS*).

In the New English Translation Psalm 115:17 reads: "The dead do not praise the LORD, nor do any of those who descend into the silence of death."

THE RESURRECTION from the DEAD

Jesus said, “For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is *the* Son of Man. “Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, and will come forth; those who did the good *deeds* to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil *deeds* to a resurrection of judgment” (John 5:26-29 NAS).

We quoted **Romans 6:23** earlier but read it again: “For the **wages of sin is death**, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

In the *New English Translation* Romans 6:23 reads: “For the payoff of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” But most churches teach that the wages of sin is eternal life in hell fire. This is the very opposite of what your Bible says!

Paul emphasized the resurrection from the dead. He wrote: “if somehow I might attain the resurrection from the dead” (Philippians 3:11 MIT). And in verse 12 Paul wrote, “Not that I have already attained this – that is, I have not already been perfected – but I strive to lay hold of that (the resurrection) for which Christ Jesus also laid hold of me” (Philippians 3:12 NET).

Our purpose is to become **true Christians** and attain to the resurrection of the dead so that we can be perfected and glorified!

Look at **1Corinthians 15:41-44**: “*There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differs from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body*” (*New American Standard – Updated, emphasis mine*).

Further in 1Corinthians 15:50-55 we read: “Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep (metaphor for dying), but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable must put on the

imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where *is* thy sting? O grave, where *is* thy victory?" (emphasis mine).

There is an orderly pattern to the resurrections. Notice 1Corinthians 15:20-24: "But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man *came* death, by man *came* also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man **in his own order**: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. Then *comes* the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power" (KJV *emphasis mine*).

The resurrection is a target – a goal in all we do. Jesus said in Luke 14:13-14: "But when you give a reception, invite *the* poor, *the* crippled, *the* lame, *the* blind, and you will be blessed, since they do not have *the means* to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous" (NAU *emphasis mine*).

The resurrection of the dead was a primary doctrinal teaching in the early church. We read in Hebrews 6:1-2: "Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, ² of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment" (NAU *emphasis mine*). The resurrection from the dead is one of the basic doctrines of the New Testament. But most churches do not preach it or teach it. Rather they have substituted the pagan doctrine of the immortality of the soul.

I quoted this earlier: "But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of *the* archangel and with the trumpet of God, **and the dead in Christ will rise first.** Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord

in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord” (1Thessalonians 4:13-18, *NAU emphasis mine*).

The trumpet mentioned in the above passage relates to the trumpet that Jesus talked about in Matthew 24:31. "And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other” (*NAS*).

Here is the way the Macdonald Idiomatic Translation reads in Matthew 24:31. “Accompanied by **a great trumpet blast**, he will dispatch his angels. They will gather His select ones from all over, from the four winds, even from the extremities under the sky” (emphasis mine).

At the end of his life Paul recognized that God had set aside the crown of righteousness for him. He wrote: “Finally the crown of righteousness is reserved for me. The Lord, the righteous Judge, will award it to me in that day—and not to me only, but also to all who have set their affection on his appearing” (2 Timothy 4:8 *NET*).

“That Day” is the day of Christ’s return and the resurrection of the dead in Christ.

LET’S EXAMINE THE PARABLE

Now, let us look carefully at the parable Jesus gave. Luke’s gospel tells us the context of this parable. It had to do with the Pharisees who were lovers of money and who were listening to several of the other parables of Jesus and yet scoffing at Him (Luke 16:14). Jesus told them that God knew their hearts, even though they justified themselves in the eyes of men. Then we come to Jesus’ key statements: “...for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God. The Law and the Prophets *were proclaimed* until John; since that time the gospel of the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it. But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter of the Law to fail” (Luke 16:15-17 *New American Standard*).

Here is the parable in its entirety. After we read it we shall examine it carefully in the light of the passages we read above.

"Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day. 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.

"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.

"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.' 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. 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.'

"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.' 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 (Abraham) said to him (the rich man), 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead'" (Luke 16:19-31 *New American Standard*).

IN DEPTH ANALYSIS OF THE PARABLE

Jesus began the parable by stating that there was a "certain rich man." It is not certain whether Jesus had a particular rich man in mind or whether He was speaking in general. To be sure there were rich men in Judea at that time and there definitely were beggars.

Jesus described the rich man as living a life of luxury in every sense. He used these words, "...he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day" (Luke 16:19 *NAU*).

In the world at that time "purple" was a type of cloth made in the city of Thyatira. We find in Acts 16:14 that Paul brought a woman by the name of Lydia to Christ.

She “was a seller of purple cloth” in Thyatira. This cloth was highly prized and expensive.

There was no doubt that the rich man had the most expensive clothing that included fine linen as well. And he indulged in immense pleasures, “joyously living in splendor every day.” He didn’t miss a day when he wasn’t eating the best food, drinking the finest wines, wearing the most expensive clothing and having plenty of enjoyment sensual pleasure. This is the picture of the rich man.

Jesus also described the poor man. The Greek word for “poor” is also translated “beggar” in various translations. It meant a person who was dependent on others for their living and was severely disadvantaged economically.

This poor man (the beggar) he didn’t have enough food and couldn’t even walk. His skin was covered with sores indicating severe lack of nutrition and a reduced immune system. He was so weak that he had to be “laid” at the gate of the rich man. The gate meant the gateway or entrance to the rich man’s home.

Jesus said the poor man’s name was Lazarus -- a common name in Judea at that time. Lazarus was not asking for anything. There is no indication that the poor man desired any of the rich man’s money, clothing, or the food from the rich man’s table. It appears he had no desire or intention to steal what the rich man owned. What he wanted and hoped for was what the rich man threw away – what the dogs ate.

Jesus makes the picture of Lazarus more vivid by adding, “...besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his (Lazarus’) sores” (Luke 16:21 NAU). Dogs in the Middle East were one of the most despised animals. To call a person a “dog” was to insult them greatly. Goliath said to David, “Am I a dog that you come to me with sticks?” (1 Samuel 17:43). David said to Saul, “After whom do you pursue? A dead dog? A flea?” (1 Samuel. 24:14). Dogs were held in such low esteem that one of the great disgraces was for a person to “be eaten by dogs” as happened to Jezebel (See 1 Kings 14:11; 16:4).

When Jesus added that the dogs felt sorry for Lazarus, He was making a major point of distinction. What was despised – dogs – had more mercy than a rich fellow citizen who lived in splendor. The rich man walked by Lazarus every day without mercy.

Next we have Jesus' statement: "**The poor man (beggar) died**" (v. 22). We have already read the many plain scriptures of the state of the dead. Paul called it a state of "sleep." Other passages said the dead had no consciousness and no memory. God said to Adam, "Dust thou art and unto dust thou shalt return" (Gen. 3:19 KJV). Lazarus died! Jesus said it plainly.

The second thing Jesus said about Lazarus was that he was "carried away by angels" (v. 22). The Greek word for "carried away" means to lead away or carry someone. It is used of Jesus when He was lead from one place to another before His crucifixion. It is used of the Apostle John when He was "carried away in the spirit" to a prophetic scene (Revelation 17:3; 21:10).

When is a person carried or led by angels? Jesus explained: "And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory. And **He will send forth His angels** with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other" (Matthew 24:30-31 NAU emphasis mine).

Notice Jesus' statement. God sends His forth with a "Great Trumpet." Paul described the time of the trumpet at the coming of Jesus Christ. "For the **Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first**. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18 NAU emphasis mine).

What is Paul describing? The resurrection of the dead! This fits with what he wrote in 1 Corinthians 15 as well. Notice: "Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep (*a metaphor for death*), but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed" (1Corinthians 15:51-52 NAU). Look at these plain passages of Scripture in your own Bible.

Paul is describing the resurrection from the dead at the time of the last trumpet when Jesus Christ appears! The dead are raised “imperishable”. Right now we are mortal – flesh and blood – but to inherit God’s Kingdom we must be immortal and imperishable – changed into spirit! Why? Because “flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God” (v. 50).

ABRAHAM’S BOSOM

Why carried into Abraham’s bosom? What is the relationship between those who believe in the true God and Abraham? In Jesus’ day all Jews considered it a most honorable thing to be called the seed of Abraham. When arguing with Jesus the Jews proudly proclaimed Abraham as their father. But Jesus told them that if Abraham were their father they would do the works of Abraham (John 8:39-40).

From Rabbinic history we read of a mother talking about martyrdom to her seven sons. The mother said to her youngest son: "And you will be brought to the bosom of our father Abraham. Do you wish that all your brothers should in the future world lie in Abraham's bosom?" (*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, article on “Bosom,” Greek = kolpos).

To be in the “bosom” of someone meant to be intimately close to them. Jesus “is in the bosom of the Father” (John 1:18). At the “last supper” the apostle John was reclining on Jesus’ bosom” (John 13:23). He referred to himself as “the disciple Jesus loved.”

All true Christians have an intimate relationship with Abraham. Paul wrote, “And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise” (Galatians 3:29 NAU).

But, was Abraham in heaven when Jesus spoke these words? Read Jesus’ own words again: "If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? **No one has ascended into heaven**, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man” (John 3:12-13 NAU emphasis mine).

Jesus knew because He had descended from heaven and was able to tell us of heavenly things. Abraham died nearly 2000 years before Jesus said these words! In the book of Hebrews we are told that Abraham as well as the other

patriarchs and many righteous prophets and servants of God died in faith but did not receive the promises God made to them. “All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth” (Hebrews 11:13 NAU).

And again in verse 39 of this same chapter: “And all these, having gained approval through their faith, **did not receive what was promised**, because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect” (Hebrews 11:39-40 NAU). Not only did they not receive the promises back then, but also they won’t receive them “apart from us.” We will all receive them at the coming of Christ at the first resurrection of the dead (Revelation 20:5-6 emphasis mine).

Rich Man in Hades

Now back to the parable. In contrast to Lazarus, the rich man was **buried** in Hades. An understanding of the original meaning of the Greek word **hades** is necessary to grasp the message of the parable. *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* states that **hades** “. . . comes from *idein* (Greek Word = to see) with the negative prefix, *a-*, and so it would mean the invisible . . . In the Septuagint Old Testament “*Hades*” occurs more than 100 times. In the majority of instances it is the translation of the Hebrew word, *she’ol*, the underworld which receives all the dead. It is the land of darkness . . .” (vol. 2, p. 206).

The *Anchor Bible Dictionary* has this to say about Hades: “The Greek word Hades (*hades*) is sometimes, but misleadingly, translated “hell” in English versions of the New Testament. It refers to the place of the dead but not necessarily to a place of torment for the wicked dead.”

Further in the article we read, “*The rise of Jewish belief in resurrection and eternal life had a significant impact on ideas about Sheol/Hades. Resurrection was understood as God’s eschatological (end time) act of bringing the dead from Hades back to life. . . Hades became the temporary abode of the dead, between death and the general resurrection at the end of the age; but there was not necessarily any other change in the understanding of Hades*” (ANCHOR BIBLE DICTIONARY, article “Hades” emphasis mine).

Jesus said this about the rich man: "In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom" (verse 23).

WHAT DID JESUS MEAN BY "TORMENT"?

This is a translation of the Greek word "basanos" which means "a touchstone." Touchstone is a dark stone used in testing metals. After a time "basanos" came to mean a torturous examination.

The etymology of **basanos** is found in Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (TDNT): "In non-biblical Greek, [*basanos*] is a commercial expression, or is used in relation to government. It then acquires the meaning of the checking of calculations, which develops naturally out of the basic sense of [*basanos, basanizein*] . . . **In the spiritual sphere it has the figurative sense, which is closely related to the original concrete meaning, of a means of testing** . . . The word then undergoes a change in meaning. The original sense fades into the background. [*Basanos*] now comes to denote "torture" or "the rack," especially used with slaves . . . [*Basanos*] occurs in the sense of "torment" . . .

Continuing from the TDNT: "The change in meaning is best explained if we begin with the object of treatment. If we put men to the test instead of metal or a coin, the stone of testing becomes torture or the rack. The metal which has survived the testing stone is subjected to harsher treatment. Man is in the same position when severely tested by torture. In the testing of metal an essential role was played by the thought of testing and proving genuineness. The rack is a means of showing the true state of affairs. **In its proper sense it is a means of testing and proving, though also of punishment.** Finally, even this special meaning was weakened and only the general element of torture remained" (volume. I, pages 561-562, emphasis mine).

When it refers to the rich man, **basanos** conveys a sense of testing through punishment. Remember, the rich man like all of us will have to stand before the judgment seat of Christ (Romans 14:10; 2 Corinthians 5:10). The Book of Hebrews describes the situation vividly: "It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31 NAU).

The rich man wakes up in the grave and is faced with having to account for himself before the piercing eye of Jesus Christ.

He claims that he is tortured "in" this flame. The Greek word for "in" is "en" and has a wide variety of meanings. It is translated "by" in many passages such as Matthew 23:18-22 where Jesus forbade people to swear by heaven, by the

temple, by the altar, etc. Another example is in Colossians 1:16 where it reads, “For by (en) him all things were created ...”

Thus the rich man was tortured “by” (en) the flame. What was the flame? The Greek word for “flame” is “phlox.” It came to be associated with the ancient views of the “evil eye.” What kind of eye does Jesus have? Not an evil one but a flaming one. “His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a **flame** of fire” (Revelation 1:14 NAU emphasis mine). In the letter to Thyatira, we read, “And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: The Son of God, who has eyes like a **flame** of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze, says this:” (Revelation 2:18 NAU emphasis mine). Jesus in this letter is examining the church at Thyatira and its deeds in detail.

When Jesus returns to judge the world and to take over all kingdoms, the Bible describes Him as having eyes like flames of fire (Revelation 19:12). To have those flaming eyes pierce into you when He examines you for your sins, would be torture for sure. “And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do” (Hebrews 4:13 NAU).

Paul exhorts us to stop judging one another for we will all answer to one judge. “But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? **For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God**” (Romans 14:10 NAS emphasis mine). He “WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS” (Romans 2:6 NAU).

2 Corinthians 5:10: “For it is imperative for all of us **to stand for inspection before the judicial throne of Christ**, that each person might be **compensated for deeds done through the body—whether such are wholesome or wicked**” (*Macdonald Idiomatic Translation* emphasis mine). Compare that to the *New American Standard*: “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”

When Paul used the word “appear” he mean “**to cause to become visible, reveal, expose publicly**” (*Arndt & Gingrich Lexicon* emphasis mine). The rich man was content to ignore the plight of his fellowman as long as nobody ever knew. But now his deeds are exposed and before the flaming eyes of Jesus Christ where the rich man is severely questioned and examined.

I quote here some very relevant Scriptural passages:

Matthew 16:27 "For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS. (NAU)

Ephesians 6:8: "...knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free" (NAU)

Colossians 3:25: "For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality. (NAU)

Revelation 2:23: "And I will kill her children with pestilence, and all the churches will know **that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds**" (NAU emphasis mine).

Revelation 20:12: "And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is *the book* of life; and **the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds**" (NAU emphasis mine).

Revelation 22:12: "Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward *is* with Me, **to render to every man according to what he has done**" (NAU emphasis mine).

WHAT IS THE "GULF" OR "CHASM"?

Our English word "chasm" or "gulf" is a translation of the Greek word "hásma." This Greek word occurs only in this parable. It reads "between us and you a great chasm (gulf) has been fixed" (v. 23). **"The fundamental difference between the rich man and Lazarus lies not in their conditions but in their characters"** (*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, article "Gulf").

For "besides all this" (v. 26), thus implying that the moral distinctions that exist in this life (v. 25) become more pronounced ("fixed") in the next, and the "gulf" is impassable in the sense that a change of condition will not necessarily produce a change of character.

The chasm or gulf has been “fixed” or “established.” Here is the definition of this Greek word “fixed”: **1. to fix firmly in a place, set up, establish, support. 2. to cause to be inwardly firm or committed, confirm, establish, strengthen (Arndt & Gingrich Greek Lexicon).**

While this word can mean to “establish or fix firmly in place”, its main usage in the New Testament is about strengthening character and setting an internal purpose of doing God’s will. When one goes against the will of God a person can establish or fix bad character. See the following passages to get a sense of how this Greek word is translated in the New Testament. **Luke 22:32; Acts 18:23; Romans 16:25; 1 Thessalonians 3:2; 2 Thessalonians 3:3; 1 Peter 5:10; Revelation 3:2; and Romans 1:11.**

The word is used of Jesus when He set his face or determined to go to Jerusalem. It is used of establishing and firming up people in the faith or strengthening their character in the faith.

There is no greater chasm or gulf than that between believers and unbelievers, between those who serve God and those who do not. This is the very basis of judgment that Jesus Christ will put into action at the last day. He talked of separating them as one separates the sheep from the goats with the sheep on His right hand and the goats on His left.

To the ones on His right hand He says, “Come, you who will receive good things from my Father. Inherit the kingdom that was prepared for you before the world began” (Matthew 25:34 *Common English Bible*)

To the ones on His left Jesus says, “Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal (age-long) fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41 *NAU*). Each asked why they were receiving their reward or their punishment. The answer had to do with how they treated those who were brothers and sisters of Christ. “Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it (or didn’t do it) to one of these brothers of Mine, *even* the least *of them*, you did it to Me” (Matthew 25:40 *NAU*). The issue had to do with acts of kindness: visiting them in sickness or prison, giving food or water or shelter to the person in need.

This is the very essence of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man didn’t give anything to a poor, starving, sick man lying in front of his house for days on end. Here is the Law about this: “There will never cease to be

some poor people in the land; therefore, I am commanding you to make sure you open your hand to your fellow Israelites who are needy and poor in your land" (Deuteronomy 15:11 *New English Translation*).

The gulf of character between those who have compassion, love and generosity for the helpless and follow God's Law, and those who don't, is fixed. And there is no compromising.

THE RICH MAN'S REQUEST

The rich man understood what Abraham meant. Therefore he pleaded, "Then I beg you, father (Abraham), that you send him (Lazarus) 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 (piercing examination)" (Luke 16:28).

Now read Abraham's answer in this parable: ""They have Moses and the prophets. They must listen to them" (Luke 16:29 *MacDonald's Idiomatic Translation*). In some translations it reads, "They have Moses and the prophets. Let them hear them." But the Greek word for "hear them" is a third person, plural imperative word. It means "they should listen to them (Moses and the prophets)" or "they must hear them."

But now we come to the crux of this parable: The rich man replied to Abraham, "Oh no, Father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will change their mind (repent)" (Luke 16:30 *MIT*). Now read Abraham's answer to the rich man. "If they do not pay attention to Moses and the prophets, neither would they be persuaded if someone would be raised from the dead." (Luke 16:31 *MIT*).

If you are so without compassion and love that the simple command to "open your hand to your poor brother" won't persuade you, then you won't be persuaded though one rose from the dead! The Scribes and Pharisees were not persuaded when Jesus rose from the dead, were they?

A PARAPHRASE OF THE PARABLE

Putting this parable in its context and interpreting it with all the plain and clear Scriptural passages on death and the resurrection here is a plain worded paraphrase of the Rich Man and Lazarus.

“Now there was a rich man and he constantly dressed in the finest clothing, having a great time living in sumptuous splendor every day of his life! And there was also this poor beggar man named Lazarus whose friends and loved ones laid him in the entrance to the rich man’s property. Lazarus was covered with skin sores from malnutrition and craving to be fed with some food the rich man threw away each day. Besides being in misery, Lazarus was so pitiful that even the dogs were continually coming and licking his sores.

One day Lazarus died and at the last trump was carried by angels to be with Abraham (as well as Isaac, Jacob, the prophets and all God’s faithful people) in a close and loving family relationship in the Kingdom of God.

The rich man also died and was buried. In the grave at the second resurrection (Revelation 20:12; Matthew 12:41) God opened his eyes and he woke to face God for his lack of compassion and the violation of the commandment. The rich man is immediately terrified to be facing God whose eyes are like flames of fire (Revelation 1:14) because he must now give account of his actions and deeds. He knew he was destined for punishment because he now saw Lazarus in close association with Abraham. Instantly he recognized him as the beggar who was placed by merciful people each day at the entrance to his property. He knew he had violated God’s law in Deuteronomy 15:11 which reads, “There will never cease to be some poor people in the land; therefore, I am commanding you to make sure you open²⁵ your hand to your fellow Israelites²⁶ who are needy and poor in your land” (*New English Translation*).

Facing just recompense for his deeds he cried out for mercy to Abraham. He asked that Lazarus be sent with a drop of water on his finger to cool off his tongue as his mouth was dry from anxiety. But Abraham explained how their circumstances now were reversed and whereas in the former life Lazarus suffered pain and agony, now it was the rich man who was in pain and agony. Besides this, Abraham explained, there is a chasm of difference between Lazarus and the rich man. Lazarus was now in the Kingdom of God which flesh and blood cannot inherit. The chasm is fixed and there is no concourse between light and darkness.

Hearing this the rich man asked that Lazarus be sent to his father’s house where he had five brothers. They also had the same hateful attitude to the poor and needy. The rich man did not want them to come to this end. But Abraham said, “They have Moses and the prophets, they must heed them.”

The rich man cried out, “No, but if one went to them from the grave they would repent.” Abraham answered, “If they will not hear (heed and act upon) Moses and the prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.”

Here is the lesson you and me! If we will not hear and respond to the Word of God -- the teachings of Jesus Christ (a greater than Moses); then not even miraculous events will reach our disobedient hearts!

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