

The Rich Man and Lazarus

Lesson * 14 (Lk. 16:19-31; Jn. 8:37-39; 11:45-53; 12:9-10, 19; Mt. 15:21-28; COL 260-271)

Introductory Matters

1. How does the story of the rich man and Lazarus begin? “There was a _____ rich man. . . .” (Lk. 16:19)

Note: In the gospel of Luke, this is the common introductory formula for the parables of Jesus so there can be no doubt that the story of the rich man and Lazarus is a parable (see, Lk. 10:33; 12:16; 13:6; 14:16; 15:11; 16:1; 19:12; 20:9).

2. What was the proper name of the beggar? “And there was a certain beggar named _____.” (Lk. 16:20)

Note: Some scholars have concluded that the story of the rich man and Lazarus is not a parable but rather a true-to-life story. They reason that because the parables (in the Bible as well as in rabbinical tradition) never contain proper names, this must mean that this story was an actual historical occurrence. But, as we shall find later in our study, there was a particular reason why Jesus included a proper name in this particular parable.

3. To whom was the parable of the rich man and Lazarus particularly addressed? “And the _____ also, who were covetous, heard all these things: and they _____ him.” (Lk. 16:14)

4. In what way were the beliefs of the Pharisees different from those of the Sadducees? “For the Sadducees say that there is no _____, neither _____, nor _____: but the Pharisees confess both.” (Acts 23:8)

Note: The Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus, amplifies this contrast between the beliefs of the Sadducees and the Pharisees: “They [the Pharisees] say that all souls are incorruptible, but that the souls of good men only are removed into other bodies,—but that the souls of bad men are subject to eternal punishment. But the Sadducees . . . take away the belief of the immortal duration of the soul, and the punishments and rewards in *Hades*.” (Flavius Josephus, Wars of the Jews II.14)

Josephus, who was himself a Pharisee, described the nature of *Hades* in his work Discourse to the Greeks Concerning Hades. There he described Hades as a subterranean region consisting of two sections. The first section contained everlasting fire. The angels took the wicked to this region upon the moment of death. The second section of Hades consisted of a place which was called the Bosom of Abraham. Josephus affirms that there was a great gulf fixed between the two sections so that the righteous could not pass to the fiery region nor the wicked to the

Bosom of Abraham. There is no place in the Bible which even vaguely suggests such a scenario. This whole picture of *Hades* was created by the rabbis. In the parable, however, Jesus took what the Pharisees believed and gave it a surprising twist!

Can the Parable be Taken Literally?

1. According to Jesus, where do people go when they die? “Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the _____ shall hear his voice” (John 5:28)
2. According to the Bible, when will the wicked be burned in the fires of hell? “As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the _____ of the _____.” (Mt. 13:40).

Note: At this point it would be well to study the following Scriptures which unequivocally teach that the wicked will be cast into the fire when Jesus comes, not at the moment of death: Matthew 25:31-32; Mark 9:43-48; John 12:48; Rev. 20:7-9, 11-15; II Peter 3:7, 12-14; II Thessalonians 1:7-9.

3. What does the story explicitly state about the rich man? “the rich man also _____ and was _____.” (Lk. 16:22)

Note: The text is explicit. The rich man not only died but was also buried. Now, the Bible says that when a person dies, their body returns to the dust (Gen. 3:19; Eccl. 12:7). This being the case, what is the rich man doing in hell with all his body parts? The story tells us he had eyes (Lk. 16:23) and tongue (Lk. 16:24). On the other hand, Lazarus is said to have fingers after he goes to the Bosom of Abraham (Lk. 16:24). The same can be said about Mk. 9:43-48. In this passage we are told that the sinner’s whole body will be cast into hell (see also, Mt. 5:29-30). The fact is that if both the rich man and Lazarus have body parts, and if the body is not cast into hell until the end of the age, then this must be describing what will happen at the end of the age and not what took place at the moment of death!

The problem of body parts in hell, has led Robert Morey, a staunch defender of the immortality of the soul and the eternal torment of the wicked at the moment of death, to confess: “Everyone understood that these parables and dialogues did not literally take place. It was understood that the rabbis used imaginative stories and dialogues as a teaching method. It was understood by all that these dialogues never took place. . . . He [Jesus] was merely using the dialogue method to get across the concept that there is no escape from torment, no second chance, and we must believe the Scriptures in this life unto salvation.” (Robert Morey, Death and the Afterlife, p. 85). So, the only passage in the Bible which **appears** to teach eternal torment at the moment of death is, admittedly, an event which **never took place**.

4. According to the Bible, where will the angels take the faithful when Jesus comes again? “And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a _____ and they shall _____ together his _____ from the four winds.” (Mt. 24:31)

Note: In the parable, Lazarus was taken to the bosom of Abraham by the angels but the Bible tells us that the righteous will be caught up to Jesus by the angels (see, I Thes. 4:16-17; Jn. 14:1-3)

5. According to the parable, was the rich man able to communicate with Abraham after he died? “And he [the rich man] cried and said, Father _____, have mercy on me. . . . But Abraham _____ [to the rich man], Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things. . . .”

Note: Deuteronomy 18:10-11 strictly forbids the communication between the living and the dead. Are we to believe that righteous dead people can communicate with wicked dead people? Spiritualists believe this but certainly not Christians!

6. What does the Bible explicitly teach about the dead? “For the _____ know that they shall die but the dead know not any _____.” (Eccl. 9:5)
7. What is meant by the expression, “the bosom of Abraham”? “Now there was _____ on Jesus’ _____ one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved” (Jn. 13:23)

Note: The bosom, in the Bible as well as today, refers to a position of particular closeness to someone (see, Isaiah 40:11; Jn. 1:18; Dt. 13:6; 28:54, 56). We will later see that the Jewish nation claimed to be particularly close to Abraham. Yet Jesus said that there was an impassible gulf between Abraham and them. Incidentally, if the parable is to be taken literally, then the “bosom of Abraham” must also be literal! How large must that bosom then be!!

8. What indication do we have that Jesus was using satire and irony in this parable? “And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the _____ of his finger in _____, and cool my tongue.” (Lk. 16:24)

Note: How much good would it do for Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water to cool the tongue of the rich man? If this were literal, the water would evaporate before it got to the rich man’s tongue. Obviously, Jesus is speaking with irony! Notice also that the rich man trusted Abraham to receive mercy instead of the Lord.

The First Application of the Parable: The Covetous Rich and the Faithful Poor

What is the central theme of this parable? “In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, Christ shows that in this _____ men decide their eternal _____. During probationary time. . . . No _____ will be granted them.” (COL 260)

1. What contrast is drawn in this parable? “This parable draws a contrast between the _____ who have not made God their dependence, and the _____ who have made God their dependence.” (COL 260)
2. The story does not say that the rich man mistreated Lazarus. What, then, was the sin of the rich man? “But he [the rich man] was selfishly _____ to the needs of his suffering brother.” (COL 261). This is not the sin of commission but the sin of omission!!
3. What is the essence of all idolatry? “All _____ is condemned as idolatry.” (COL 261). This is corroborated in Colossians 3:5.

Note: If this litmus test for idolatry were applied in the church today, how idolaters would there be?

4. Why did Jesus use this theologically erroneous parable? “In this parable Christ was meeting the people on their _____ ground. The doctrine of a conscious state of existence between death and the resurrection was held by many of those who were _____ to Christ’s words. The Saviour knew of their ideas, and He framed His parable so as to inculcate important truths through these preconceived opinions.” (COL 263).
5. What did Jesus mean by the expression “a great gulf fixed”? “Thus Christ represented the _____ of looking for a _____ probation. This life is the only time given to man in which to _____ for eternity.” (COL 263)
6. Whom did the rich man place above God? “He did not pray to God, but to _____. Thus he showed that he placed Abraham above God, and that he relied on his relationship to Abraham for _____.” (COL 264)
7. How do our privileges relate to our responsibilities? “Man’s _____ are _____ to his opportunities and _____.” (COL 265) Luke 12:48 corroborates this principle.
8. How can we lay up treasures beside the throne of God? “Far better might he lay up his moeny beside the throne of God, by _____ it to do _____. Death cannot make any man poor who this devotes himself to seeking eternal _____. But the man who hoards his treasure for self can not take any of it to _____.” (COL 266). See the Biblical background to this idea in Matthew 6:19-21.
9. What shall we be able to carry to the heavenly courts? “Money cannot be carried into the next life; it is not needed there; but the good _____ done in winning souls to Christ are _____ to the heavenly courts.” (COL 266)

The Second Application of the Parable

1. Whom does the rich man represent? “The rich man was favored with every temporal and spiritual blessing, but he refused to _____ with God in the use of these blessings. Thus it was with the _____ nation.” (COL 267)

Note: In the strictest sense of the word, the rich man represents the Pharisees. This is true for at least five reasons: **1)** The rich man addressed Abraham as father and Abraham addressed Lazarus as son (Lk. 16:24, 25, 27, 30). The Jews in general, but the Pharisees in particular claimed Abraham as their father (see, Jn. 8:37-44; Mt. 3:9). **2)** The Pharisees claimed to have a special closeness to Abraham. Jesus would never have described the Gentiles as being in the “bosom of Abraham”. **3)** The rich man had five brothers. These could very well represent the other Jewish denominations of Christ’s day: The Sadducees, the Herodians, the Scribes, the Zealots and the Essenes. **4)** It is clear that the rich man believed in the immortality of the soul because he asked Abraham to send someone to his brother from among the dead (verse 30). This is precisely what the Pharisees believed! **5)** The brothers of the rich man “had Moses and the Prophets” (verse 31). It was the Jews who had Moses and the Prophets (Jn. 5:39-46).

2. What did Jesus teach regarding natural genetic lineage? “Christ recognized no virtue in lineage. He taught that spiritual connection _____ all natural connection.” (COL 268)
3. What did Jesus say to a gentile woman who begged Jesus to heal her daughter and what did the woman say in return? “It is not meet to take the _____ bread, and to cast it to _____. . . . Truth, Lord: Yet the dogs eat of the _____ which fall from the masters’ table.” (Mt. 15:26, 27)

Note: There are several parallel words in this passage to the parable of the rich man and Lazarus: Crumbs, dogs, table, children. This would indicate that Lazarus represents the gentiles. The Jews called the gentiles, “stones” (Mt. 3:9-10), “dogs” (Mt. 15:26) and “swine” (Mt. 7:6)

4. **Thought Question:** Sometimes it is important not only to read what a passage says but also what it does not say. Does this passage use any of the following words (in bold type):

“**Immediately** after he died,” (Lk. 16:23) “His **body** was buried,” (Lk. 16:23) “his **soul** was in **everlasting** torments,” (Lk. 16:23) “send the **soul** of Lazarus,” (Lk. 16:24) “being in the **everlasting** torments of hades,” (Lk. 16:23) “in this **eternal** flame,” (Lk. 16:24) “his **soul** is comforted.” (Lk. 16:25). The sobering fact is that the words “soul” and “everlasting are missing!

5. What indication do we have in the parable that the rich man believed in the immortality of the soul? “Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them _____ the _____, they will repent.” (Lk. 16:30)

6. Did Jesus believe a dead person could impart a message to the rich man's five brothers? "And he [Jesus] said unto him [the rich man], If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one _____ from the dead." (Lk. 16:31).

Note: It is clear that Jesus believed in the resurrection of the dead, not the immortality of the soul. The word "rise" in this text is used repeatedly by Luke to describe the resurrection (see, Lk. 18:33; 24:7, 46; Acts 26:23). It is also used by Jesus in John 11:24, 25 to describe His own resurrection.

7. **Thought Question:** Why did Jesus employ the proper name "Lazarus" in this one parable?
Hint: The answer to this question is found in COL 265 _____
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8. What did the Jews attempt to do to Jesus after He resurrected Lazarus? "Then from that they forth they took counsel together for to put him to _____." (Jn. 11:53).

9. What did the Jews attempt to do to Lazarus after his resurrection? "But the chief priests consulted that they might put Lazarus also to _____." (Jn. 12:10)

Note: The words of Jesus in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus were proved true. Lazarus went to the Jews after rising from the dead and yet they did not believe in Jesus. This is what Jesus meant when He said: "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead." (Lk. 16:31)

10. Was the Jewish nation "consumed" for their rejection of the Messiah? "The king. . . . sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and _____ up their city." (Mt. 22:7)

Note: The city of Jerusalem was burned up by the Romans [God's instruments] and the Jews have been suffering fiery trials ever since (see, Lk. 19:41-44) The kingdom was taken from the Jews and given to the Gentiles (see, Acts 13:46-47)

The Final Application of the Parable

1. To whom does the parable apply in the end-time? "Today, there is a class in our world who are _____. They are not gluttons, they are not drunkards, they are not infidels; but they desire to live for _____, not for God. He is not in their thoughts; therefore they are classified as _____." (COL 270)
2. What is it that fits us to dwell with Christ in heaven? "To learn of Christ means to receive his grace, which is His _____. But those who do not appreciate and utilize the precious _____ and sacred influences granted them on _____, are not fitted to take part in the pure devotion of heaven." (COL 271)

3. **Thought Question:** Do you suppose that this parable could have something to do with the message of Jesus to the Laodicean church? What relationship do you see? Do you think the Laodicean Church could repeat this story? _____
