

## **The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31)**

### **“God’s Word is All We Need!”**

Very often, the spectacular or anything that spawns amazement excites us. Magicians make a good living with their tricks and sleight of hand. This is very true in the realm of the spiritual. The more mysterious the boasts and testimonies, the more people will flock to hear and see. Thus was born the amazing claims of the Charismatics that have travelled round the world many times over, from the continent of Australia to the remote corners of the continent of Africa. The raising of the dead, healing of diseases, the lame walking again and cancer patients being healed instantaneously are included in these claims. Millions of pages of books flood the bookshops worldwide reaping in millions for the authors and publishers. These tales of the miraculous capture the fascination of many.

The Bible is a book of miracles but Christians are not to be hoodwinked by the miraculous claims of today. The power to save souls remains the domain of God through the convicting power of the still small voice of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will use the eternal pure and perfect Word of God to redeem souls from hell and darkness and to deliver them from the bondage of sins.

**The elements of the Parable** – The rich man refers to anyone who thinks well of himself and enjoys self-sufficiency in this life. Lazarus represents all sinners who have been saved by the grace of God in Christ Jesus. Abraham’s bosom refers to the third heaven or paradise. Hell refers to the actual place where those who die in their sins will go; and the great gulf fixed refers to the unbridgeable chasm between heaven and hell.

**The explanation of the Parable** – The main characters are two individuals. The rich man is not named. He was rich. He clothed himself in purple and fine linen (best linen clothes) which was a royal colour signifying wealth and distinction in his society. Linen was the material used for the priestly garments and would be seen as very prestigious. Not only did he dress richly and splendidly, he dined sumptuously as well. He feasted luxuriously every day.

On the other hand, there was Lazarus the beggar. His name means “God is helper”. They both lived in the same vicinity. Lazarus was outside the gate of the rich man’s house begging for food. The word used is “laid”. This verb with the pluperfect tense means that he had been cast or flung there at the gate of the rich man like an unwanted piece of trash! Robertson’s Word Pictures says, “contemptuous roughness.” He was covered with sores. The sores were ulcerous which made it very painful and smelly. He desired (strong desire likened to lust) to be fed the crumbs that fell from the rich man’s table. He was not choosy about what food to eat as long as there was food. The food could be covered with dirt or half consumed by the rich man or stale, it did not matter to Lazarus. He was ravenous and was not fussy. Dogs came to relieve him by licking his wounds. If Lazarus was a Jew, this would have been a most revolting experience. Dogs

were considered unclean. But Lazarus was in a most wretched state. The dogs were his only companions. If food was thrown his way then Lazarus would have to fight or share the crumbs with the dogs. These were not clean and cute pet dogs found in homes today but wild unwanted stray dogs that roamed the dusty and dirty streets of towns.

Equality struck both the rich man and Lazarus. This equality of all equalities is death. What is done on earth determines one's eternal destiny. Lazarus was found in Abraham's bosom whereas the rich man ended up in hell. The former is a place of peace and tranquillity and safety. The latter is a place of torment and intense pain and suffering. It must be noted here that the rich man did not go to hell because of his wealth. Neither can we conclude that Lazarus went to Abraham's bosom because of his poverty. The reason is in the dialogue between the rich man and Abraham. The rich man asked that Lazarus be sent back to earth to witness to the rich man's brothers so that they might repent of their sins. Abraham replied that they have the Bible (Moses and the prophets i.e. the Law and the prophets representing the entire Old Testament) as witness to help them believe in God. The Bible is Jesus Christ! Lazarus believed in Jesus Christ as his Lord and Saviour whereas the rich man did not. His wealth and fine dining consumed him. He had no time for Christ. He died in his sins without the Saviour which is why he ended up in Hell after death!

While in hell and in torment, the rich man saw Lazarus in Abraham's bosom. He cried to Abraham. He asked, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame." He asked for mercy after death! But no mercy is given after death. It is impossible to bridge the great chasm between hell and Abraham's bosom. Furthermore, the rich man was reminded about the good life he had lived when he was alive on earth and that Lazarus was miserable when he was on earth. What was not done in life remains undone forever. What is done on earth will be evaluated on the day of judgement. The rich man showed no compassion for people like Lazarus who were poor on earth but were children of God. They are rich in heaven though poor on earth. They will now enjoy the richness of heaven for eternity even though they suffered for a moment on earth.

Suddenly, the rich man became a fervent evangelist. He was concerned for the souls of his five brothers who were just like him. He did not want them to end up in hell like him. He asked Abraham to send Lazarus to witness to his five brothers who were without Christ. Abraham's reply was that they had Moses and the prophets (referring to the Word of God) as their witness. He argued that Lazarus's resurrection from the dead would surely impact them for Christ! But Abraham added that if they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead. The faithful preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ according to the Scriptures is more potent in converting sinners into saints than seeing a genuine miracle from God.

**The application of the Parable** – The context of this parable highlights the great importance of the Word of God on this earth and for eternity. Christ gave this parable immediately after He rebuked the Pharisees who were covetous and had derided Christ. They kept on scoffing and sneering at Christ for His teachings. After the first three parables of the lost sheep, lost coin and lost son, there was no reaction from them. But after the parable of the unjust steward, they realized that Christ rebuked them. Their sneers resulted in the words of rebuke from Christ. Jesus said, *“Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God. 16 The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it. 17 And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail. 18 Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery.”* [Luke 16:15-18] The Word of God had been given to the people from the very beginning until the time of John (John the Baptist) and every man presseth into it i.e. many suffered violence to enter it. The law of marriage must have been the law most abused by the Pharisees. Hence, Christ singled this law out for mention to highlight the importance of the Word of God. It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than one tittle of the law to fail. God is not mocked when man diminishes God’s holy and perfect Word. Those who propound that there was the perfect Word of God in the past but not anymore today are playing with fire. The LORD will chastise them most severely for their double talk!

Salvation will bring forth acts of compassion from sinners who have truly received God’s grace. They will know how to help people who are destitute like Lazarus. The behaviour of the rich man is likened to the behaviour of men like the Pharisees who were rich in the eyes of men and the things of this world but were poor in spiritual things.

Anyone who had a loved one who had died without Christ must understand that they do not need to join them in hell. They would not want you to be in torment like them because they loved you. They would want you to believe in Christ because they did not!

The power of the gospel of Jesus Christ according to Scriptures must not be exchanged for the miraculous. It is a poor exchange. The Bible is very clear on this truth! **1 Corinthians 1:18** (KJV): *“For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.”*