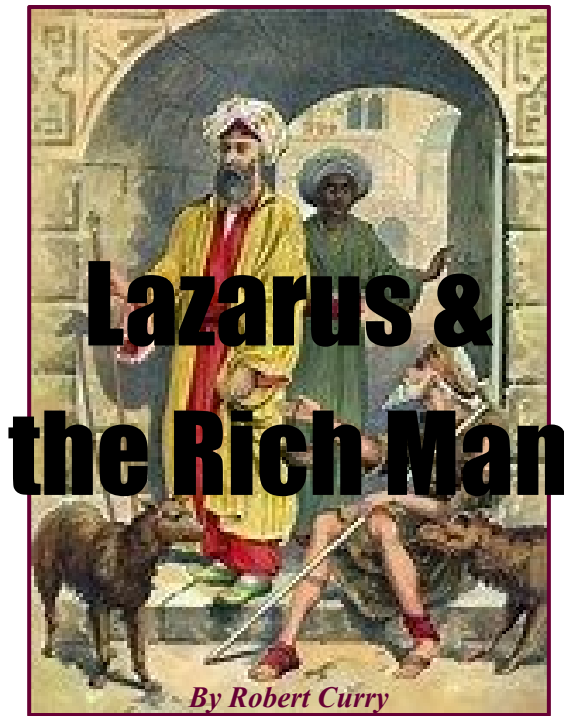


*What Does This
Most-Misunderstood Parable
Really Teach?*

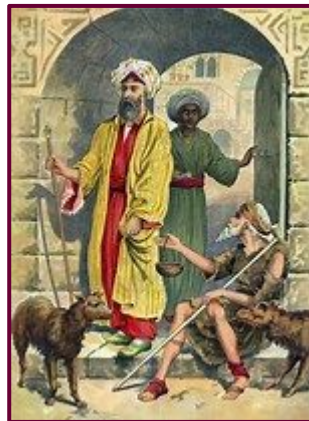


Matthew, Mark and Luke feature 42 parables. We don't talk in parables.

“How's it goin'?”

“There was a certain family who loved each other very much until one day one got mad because ...”

No, we don't talk that way! But we know Jesus did and we think we know why—we think He wanted even the simplest folk to understand so He told them down-to-earth stories. We probably don't think of actually asking Jesus why He spoke in parables, but one day His Disciples did!



Have you ever noticed why Jesus said He spoke in parables?

He said to His disciples: “*To you* it has been given to know *the mystery* of the kingdom of God; but to those who are outside, all things come in parables, so that ‘Seeing they may see and not perceive, and hearing they may hear and not understand; lest they should turn, and their sins be forgiven them’” (Mark 4:11-12).

If there's ever a parable most mysterious and most misunderstood, it's the parable that's probably the most famous one: Lazarus & the Rich Man (Luke 16:19-31).

It is commonly believed that this parable—more than anywhere else in the Bible—proves people are immortal souls who go to heaven or hell when they die.

Hardly a surprise, it goes back to the Garden

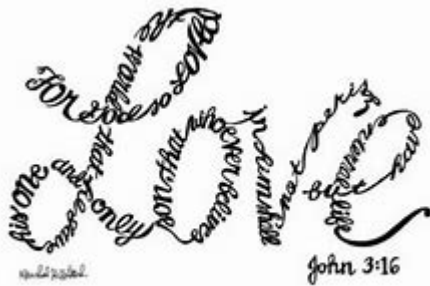
And satan's big lie to Adam and Eve: “You shall not surely die” (Gen. 3:4). He conned them into believing they would live forever because they were immortal souls. The one who tried to swoop up to heaven would

convince mankind that would be their destination when they died, if they were good, but if bad, they would get his punishment of ever-burning hell.

Two requirements for accurate Bible study

◆ The first is overall Bible teaching

The Bible from cover to cover refutes the idea of having an immortal soul and going to heaven or ever-burning hell upon death. Here are the three clearest scriptures:



- Regarding immortal soul, look no further than the most oft-quoted scripture: “For God so loved [you] that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not *perish* but *have everlasting life*” (John 3:16). Did you notice that it says through Christ you can have everlasting life—you do not already have it as an immortal soul. And without Christ we will *perish*.
- Regarding heaven, John 3:13 is so plain, and the only question is: do we believe what Jesus Himself says? Who would know better than Him! It amuses me that Bible helps don’t even try to explain it away. Except *Albert Barnes’ Notes on the Bible* makes a laughable comment that Jesus meant that none of the humans who have gone to heaven have returned to tell about it. Please, read it for yourself.
- Regarding hell, Malachi prophesies “all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be *stubble... ashes* under the soles of your feet” (Mal. 4:1-3). “The day which is coming shall *burn them up*” in the Lake of Fire which purges the earth of all material, physical, and sinful so that God the Father can come down and live on the New Earth (Rev. 20:14-15, 21:1-4).

Yet most people still believe satan’s devilish lie and therefore read it into what the Bible actually teaches about Lazarus & the Rich Man.

And maybe you’re like me, and it’s been years since you’ve studied this crucial parable. Maybe you know it doesn’t teach heaven and hell, but

you've grown hazy on the details and would be in trouble if asked to explain what it really teaches.

◆ **The second requirement for accurate Bible study is the context.**

The biggest eye opener for me is studying the context of this parable. I don't know if I'd ever been aware of it. If I had, I had totally forgotten it! I just jumped right into the parable [Luke 16:19-31] like most shallow analyzers do. Context shows what Jesus meant the parable to show and whom he was really talking about.

The Context of This Parable

In verse 1 Jesus was talking to *His disciples*. The whole chapter is about rich men and *the proper use of money*. Christ begins with a parable about "a certain rich man who had a steward."

His disciples today repeat the big lessons: "He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much ... No servant can serve two masters ... You cannot serve God and mammon" (vs. 10-13).

"The Pharisees, who were lovers of money

also heard all these things, and they derided Him" (v. 14). Lamponed! Poo-pooed! The Son of God on earth! The Living Word! How could they be so foolish! You mean like when we mistreat the written Word of God?

In verse 15 Jesus warned the Pharisees: "God knows **your hearts**. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God." Another time He told the scribes and Pharisees: "But their heart is far from Me" (Matt. 15-7-9).

There's no doubt that the Pharisees remained unconvinced. And they sneered at Jesus because they knew He was talking about them! Jesus talked about them a lot because of their hypocrisy and self-righteousness. Still He loved them and would die for them too.

In Matt. 23 Jesus pronounced seven "woes" on the Pharisees! We should take a careful look at them and ask if He's woeing us!

So then Christ told His parable about Lazarus & the Rich Man intended to

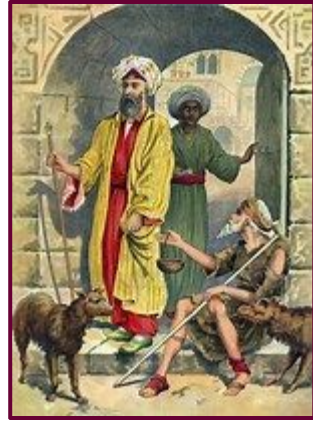
Underline the importance of what He had just said

It's an allegorical story to convey spiritual truth. It was not about a real Lazarus or rich man---not the Lazarus of Mary and Martha whom Jesus resurrected. But it is the only parable where a character is identified by name, probably to make the story feel more real.

Now it's time to see what this mysterious, most-misunderstood parable is actually about!

The rich man is clothed in purple (v. 19). Only the wealthy and royalty could afford purple dye. He wore "fine linen and fared sumptuously every day." It makes you think of the 1980s TV program, "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous."

It should make us think rather about



The fine linen

of the Bride of Christ—"the righteous acts of the saints" (Rev. 19:7-8). And about Laodiceans who think they are rich and increased and in need of nothing when they are actually blind and naked! (3:17).

The rich man lived by the zero-sum rule—he wanted the whole pie for himself.

J.K. Rowling recently fell off the list of billionaires because she gave away enough money to fall below the threshold. She worries what Harry would do, while we should concern ourselves with what our heavenly Potter would want His clay to do!

Now let's see what happens to these two defining men.

What Happens to Lazarus?

Lazarus the beggar was “full of sores, who was laid at his gate” (v. 20). He couldn’t walk himself there or quietly show up. The rich man recognized Lazarus and called him by name in the parable, so he had to know the beggar was nearby. But he just didn’t care or offer any help.

Lazarus hoped only to be fed with crumbs falling off his table (v. 21) and the rich man probably fed his dogs choice morsels! They kindly licked the beggar’s sores! How often do dogs act more Christian than their masters!

Yes, the rich man seems to be both blessed and fortunate, and the poor man rejected and cursed. There’s no question which most people would rather be. So we love to watch Tevia shimmy and jive “If I Were a Rich Man!”

Both men died (v. 22)

Here’s where Bible truth has to prevail, not satan’s big lie to Adam and Eve.

“It is appointed for men to die once” (Heb. 9:27-28). It would never cross the mind of most of us to worry about dying more than once. Yet the Bible and this parable show us that we want to strive for dying only once by living the way God wants—and not face the second death as the Rich Man will!

Solomon laments in Ecclesiastes that the rich and the poor die alike. This parable says the rich man “was buried” (v. 22). The beggar “died” so he also went to the grave where he would also turn to dust (Gen. 3:19). That reminds me of the little kid who, after looking under the bed, was frantic: “Mommy, somebody’s either coming or going!”

Where do Lazarus & the Rich Man go?

“For the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life [Lazarus!], and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation [the Rich Man]” (John 5:28-29).

Now is it any wonder this parable is so misunderstood? If you believe in

going to heaven upon death, why would you even need one resurrection? You've already been fitted for wings and started harp lessons!

This parable involves the first and third resurrections. Yes, there are

Three resurrections in the Bible!

This allegory blurs the time together, but there is over a 1,000 years difference between the three resurrections. To understand this most-misunderstood parable, you have to understand the Holy Days (Lev. 23) which teach God's plan of salvation to understand the proper timing. By the way, if you want to understand the Holy Days, you need to be keeping them! (Psa. 111:10).

The first one saints like Lazarus and Abraham will be in is the best one (Heb. 11:35) with a double portion for the firstborn (Deut. 21:17). The firstfruits will not only be unveiled as part of the Bride of Christ but will be in on the ground floor of the Kingdom of God with top responsibilities.



In the allegory Lazarus is “carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom” *at the Second Coming when the Seventh Trumpet blows* (Matt. 24:31). Like Lazarus, Abraham had “died in faith, *not having received the promises*, but having seen them afar off were assured of them [and] embraced them” (Heb. 13). He hasn’t received the promises because Christ hasn’t returned yet!

Miriam Webster online defines “bosom” [Greek *koipos*] as the seat of emotions and intimate feelings. The best example is a nursing mother.

Saints like Lazarus will be resurrected along with the Father of the Faithful [Gal. 3:16-29, Rom. 4:9-12] and the Friend of God [James 2:23] into a deep intimate relationship for all eternity! After the angels carry them to meet Christ in the air, and they become the Bride of Christ, they will accompany Him to earth where the Kingdom and the meek will always be (Rev. 5:10, 21:1-3, Matt. 5:5).

What Torments the Rich Man?

According to different modern translations of Luke 16:23, which take great interpretive liberty with the Greek, the Rich Man is in hell in great pain, suffering terribly, in constant torment. You'd think you're reading Dante Alighieri!

According to different modern translations of Luke 16:23, the Rich Man is in hell in great pain, suffering terribly, in constant torment. You'd think the translators are Dante Alighieri!

A crucial principle of

Wise Bible study

is to put all the scriptures on a subject together, and then since the Bible doesn't contradict itself, let the clear, plain ones guide you through the more obscure ones that people twist to sincere but wrong beliefs. The Bible says plainly that "the dead know nothing" (Eccl. 9:5) and "there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave" (v. 10). *Young's Literal Translation* has it correct: "in the hades, having lifted up his eyes, being in torments."

The Greek word *Hades* translated "hell" means the grave. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* states: "In the New Testament Hades is never used of the destiny of the believer" (vol. 8, p. 992).

The Bible likens death in the grave to "sleep in the dust" (Job 7:21). The Rich Man wakes up in a resurrection of condemnation (John 5:29)—"lifts up his eyes"—and is "tormented in this flame" (v. 24). Aha! Roasting in ever-burning hell fire!

Then why does he ask only that "Abraham send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue"? You'd think he'd want firemen dousing him with a hose!

The situation has reversed!

Tables turned. Lazarus is spiritually rich. The Rich Man becomes the beggar!

He had been aware of Lazarus enough to ask Abraham to send him by name. Ironically the Rich Man is still treating Lazarus as a lowly servant to order around!

Mental anguish

The word “tormented” is translated from the Greek word *odunao*. *The NAS New Testament Greek Lexicon* explains that this word describes intense *mental anguish* or distress.

Odunao is used in Acts 20:38 where Paul had to say goodbye to the Ephesus elders and would never see them again—mental anguish, sorrowful, grieving.



Actually in Greek [en] the Rich Man is tormented “by” not “in this flame.” He has been judged guilty of the final death sentence—the Lake of Fire—and is about to be tossed in!

The dread of imminent barbeque has made his mouth nearly dry, kind of like where Christ said “I thirst” at His crucifixion (John 19:28).

Which resurrection?

This is not the second one where “the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished” (Rev. 20:5). The Rich Man has not been resurrected into the Great White Throne Judgment where all who have never had their opportunity for salvation will have it (vs. 11-12).

We can surmise this because the Rich Man would have known about his five brothers and what became of them spiritually. Odds are they were in the GWTJ period. Are the five brothers supposed to make us think of the five foolish virgins who don't have enough Holy Spirit to become the Bride of Christ (Matt. 25:1-13).

Here's the biggest clue: “The flame” shows the Rich Man is in the third resurrection (vs. 13-15) and is about to be burned up for eternity

in the Lake of Fire (Greek *gehenna*).

The great gulf

At this final judgment, you will either be found written in the Book of Life and be a Son or Daughter of God in the Family and Kingdom of God for eternity or you will be burned up and become ashes in "the second death" and be no more (Mal. 4:1-3). Immortal or goner ... talk about a great gulf!

While in the grave, the Rich Man had lost all track of time and didn't know that the 1,000 years had passed and also the years of the Great White Throne Judgment which could be 100 (Isa. 65:20). For those in the grave, when they wake up in a resurrection seems like the next moment. The Lake of Fire isn't the momentous occasion to want!

Thankfully there probably won't be many in this situation since God is so merciful, desires all to be saved, and gives everyone their due opportunity to choose His wonderful way of life.

The Rich Man didn't know that it was

Too late

for humans to be warned by anybody, and the parable says it wouldn't do any good anyway. All the miracles Israel witnessed in the Old Testament didn't convert anybody.

There were nine times of resurrection back to physical life in the Bible. The Rich Man thinks maybe his brothers would listen if somebody came back from the dead to warn them to shape up. Resurrections are powerful, but they for the most part did not result in a big change in society. The enemies of the truth continued in their erroneous ways and the Pharisees who heard Christ speak the parable of Lazarus and the rich man did not change—not even after Christ was resurrected! Thankfully Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea did become Disciples, but the resurrection of Jesus didn't change Saul until he was struck down by Christ in Acts 9 and became the Apostle Paul.

Jesus is giving the Pharisees a stern indictment because “they do not hear Moses and the prophets” (Luke 16:31). The Pharisees thought they followed Moses and the prophets but Jesus told them if they believed Moses, they would believe Him (John 5:46-47). Also earlier He had warned them that “There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out” (13:28).

“For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain *fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation* which will devour the adversaries” (Hebrews 10:26-27).

That the Rich Man talks with Abraham indicates that resurrected saints will be on the scene for the third resurrection. This would only make sense since this is a huge event in the plan of God, albeit a most unhappy one. Saints may want to say a tearful goodbye to ones special to them.

Paul said we will judge angels and the world (1 Cor. 6:1-2). The fate of satan and the demons has already been decreed in Scripture. They get the eternal torment they deceived people into dreading. They will be cast into the “lake of fire and brimstone” (Rev. 20:10) before the start of the Great White Throne Judgment. Being spirit, they don’t burn up. Jude said they are “wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever” (v. 13). After Babylon falls the second time at the Second Coming, this time the religious/military/economic one-world government, it will “become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird!” (Rev. 18:2).

Jesus said the Father put all judgment into His hands (John 5:22-24), and surely Jesus who died for all to be saved will decide who is condemned to the Lake of Fire. No saint would want to decide such a finality.

What Should We Do?

We should judge ourselves! The lesson of Lazarus & the Rich Man is to focus on how we view and use money properly and help the needy. We must serve God and not mammon!

How we live today matters most because

Judgment is on us today (1 Pet. 4:17)

like it was for Lazarus and the Rich Man. We are responsible for what we've been given materially but especially spiritually. Let's "be even more diligent to make [our] call and election sure" (1 Pet. 1:10) and be in the better first resurrection with Abraham and the saints!

It's not too late to change our ways and care for others.



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