

PARABLES OF JESUS

THE PARABLE OF THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS, LUKE 16:19-31

A. A setting based on contrasts (19-23)

1. In life (19-21), *There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores.*

- a. A rich man lived a life wearing fine clothes and feasting on rich food.
- b. Lazarus (means *whom God has helped*), a poor man lay at the rich man's gate, hoping to be fed from what fell from the rich man's table. Dogs came and licked his sores.
- c. Darrell Bock, *The naming of the poor man as Lazarus and the failure to name the rich man personalizes the level of concern for the poor man, while making clear that the rich man is a representative figure. God cares for each poor person and is fully aware of their plight. The rich man could be any rich individual.*

2. In death (22-23)

a. The poor man was carried by angels to Abraham's side (22a), *The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side.*

1) Angels assisted Lazarus through death, Hebrews 1:14, *Are they (angels) not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?*

2) Lazarus is at rest beside Abraham

- a) Thomas Constable, *The figure of Abraham's bosom connotes a place of security, godly fellowship with other Old Testament believers, and honor.*
- b) *Abraham's side* is comparable to Paradise in Luke 23:43, *And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise."*
- c) It possibly picturing the future messianic banquet in the millennial kingdom, Luke 13:28-29, *In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God but you yourselves cast out. And people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God.*
- d) Now, Lazarus was enjoying a banquet instead of lying outside the rich man's estate.

3) Lazarus was righteous not because he was poor but because he placed his trust in God.

b. The rich man ended up in Hades in torment (22b-23a), *The rich man also died and was buried, and in Hades, being in torment*

1) He died, was buried, ended up in Hades, with no fanfare nor honor.

2) In the New Testament, Hades refers to the abode of the unsaved dead before resurrection and condemnation at the great white throne judgment, note Revelation 20:11-15.

3) The rich man had plenty of opportunities to show mercy to Lazarus but he had refused.

4) J. Dwight Pentecost, *According to rabbinical teaching, the Pharisees believed that Father Abraham sat at the gate of hades and would not let one of his sons pass through.*

- a) The rich man was wrong.
- b) Being rich does not mean one is righteous nor does it mean one is unrighteous.

B. Cries for help from the rich man (23b-31)

1. For himself (23b-26)

a. His request (23b-24)

1) The rich man saw Lazarus with Abraham (23b), *he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side.*

- a) He could see the righteous people far away but could not join them.
- b) He recognized Abraham and Lazarus who had not been invited into his home.
- c) He had thought his wealth demonstrated his righteousness but it enslaved him.

- 2) He cried out to Abraham for mercy (24), *And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.'*
 - a) He asked *Father Abraham* for mercy.
 - 1] He used the Jewish term of respect for Abraham but Abraham would not grant his request.
 - 2] John 8:39, *They answered him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing the works Abraham did,*
 - b) He was in fiery agony , Matthew 13:41-43, The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.
 - c) He asked that Abraham send Lazarus to cool his tongue with water.
 - d) Thomas Constable, *The rich man still viewed Lazarus as a servant who could help him rather than as an equal. His judgment had not led him to repent of his selfishness even in death.*
 - b. Abraham's response (25-26), *But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.'*
 - 1) Abraham responded with compassion by addressing the rich man as *child*, the Greek word for child which conveys tenderness.
 - 2) Abraham denied his request.
 - a) His torment was not to equal things out between Lazarus and himself, but the result of pursuing wealth instead of God.
 - 1] Luke 12:21, *So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.*
 - 2] Dwight Pentecost, *If wealth is used selfishly, it will perish; but if it is used as a means of showing mercy it can gain eternal reward.*
 - b) There is a permanent separation between the saved and the lost.
 - 1] Hebrews 9:27, *And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment,*
 - 2] There is no purgatory with the hope of changing one's eternal condition.
2. For his brothers (27-31)
- a. His request (27-28), *And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house— for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.'*
 - 1) Next, the rich man asked Abraham to send Lazarus to warn his brothers.
 - 2) The rich man is now concerned about eternal issues and hopes it won't be too late for his brothers.
 - 3) Again, the rich man wanted Abraham to send *him*, Lazarus.
 - a) He either couldn't bear to speak the poor man's name or he never knew it, even though Lazarus had begged at his gate.
 - b) It appears the rich man still considered himself better than Lazarus who had nothing better to do than what he commanded.
 - b. Abraham's response (29-31), *But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' And he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'*
 - 1) Abraham declared that his brothers should listen to Moses and the Prophets (the entire Old Testament).
 - a) God has chosen His word to bring conviction of spiritual need.
 - b) Hebrews 4:12, *For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*

- 2) The rich man pleaded that they would repent if someone who died would make the appeal but Abraham said they would not.
 - a) Angels appeared to people in the Old Testament but people did not believe them (angels came to Sodom in Genesis 19).
 - b) Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead and the Pharisees wanted to kill Jesus and Lazarus, John 12:10-11, *So the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well, because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus.*
 - c) Even today, people want special revelation instead of the Word of God.

CONCLUSION

- A. True blessing in this life and the life to come is based on spiritual not material pursuits.
- B. The primary way God convicts people is by His Word, the Bible.
- C. There is heaven to gain and hell to lose; choose Christ.

RESOURCES

Holman Treasury of Key Bible Words: Hades; Luke 16:23; Acts 2:27, 31; Revelation 20:13–14

Although many people think that hades and hell are synonymous, there is actually a big difference between saying “he’s in hell” and “he’s in hades.” The Greek term hades means “the place of the unseen.” It designates the invisible world of the dead, as does the Hebrew word sheol. All people who die go to hades because all pass from the visible world to the invisible.

Originally the Greeks thought that being in hades was a shadowy, ghostlike existence that happened to all who died, good and evil alike. Gradually, they and the Romans came to think of it as a place of reward and punishment. The Roman poet Virgil, 70–19 B.C., described hades as an elaborately organized and guarded realm where the good were rewarded in the Elysian Fields and the evil were punished. Hades became important to the Jews as the typical term used by the translators of the Septuagint (the Greek Old Testament) to render the Hebrew name sheol into Greek. This was a very suitable translation for the Hebrew term because both words can signify the “physical grave” or “death” (Gen. 37:35; Prov. 5:5; 7:27), and both originally referred to a dark underworld (Job 10:21–22). Later, Jews spoke of the idea of reward and punishment after death in this place. In other Jewish literature, hades is the place of torment for the wicked, while the righteous enter Paradise (see Wisdom of Solomon 2:1; 3:1).

Thus, by the beginning of the New Testament period, hades had three meanings: (1) death, (2) the place of all the dead, and (3) the place of the wicked dead only. Context determines which meaning an author intends in a given passage. In Matthew 11:23 and Luke 10:15, Jesus speaks of the descending of Capernaum to hades. He simply means that the city will be destroyed. In Acts 2:27, quoting Psalm 16:10, hades is referred to as the place of the dead. Christ did not stay among the dead in hades; unlike David, He rose from the dead (see Acts 2:27). In Revelation 20:13–14, hades refers to the place of the dead, because hades is emptied of all who are in it at the end of the world. When the wicked are judged and cast into the lake of fire (see Hell), hades is also thrown in the lake of fire. Luke 16:23, however, clearly refers to hades as the place of the wicked dead. There, the rich man is tormented in flames, while the poor man Lazarus goes to Paradise.

Unfortunately, the word hades was often translated as “hell” in the King James Version. But there is a different Greek word for “hell”; it is gehenna (Mark 9:43–45). We cannot avoid hades, “the grave” or “the place of the dead”; but we can avoid “hell” by believing in Jesus and receiving eternal life.