

Some thoughts on --

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## **LAZARUS and the RICH MAN**

A Parable or a Real Event?

Aimed more pointedly at the religious rulers in Luke chapters 15 and 16; Jesus spoke many parables. One most frequently misunderstood is the story of Lazarus and the rich man. Following is as it appears in the King James Version.

### **Luke 16:19-31**

“There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day:

And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores,

And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.

And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried.

And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

And he cried and said, ‘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.’

But Abraham said, ‘Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime received thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.

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And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us that would come from thence.

Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: for I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment.'

Abraham saith unto him, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.'

And he said, 'Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.'

And he said unto him, 'If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead'' (Luke 16:19-31).

Steeped in their own traditions and teachings, the religious leaders were uninterested in learning from such a one as Jesus. In the story, to address Father Abraham with a request wouldn't be unusual as they considered their lineage adequate for salvation. Pride and self-righteousness is hard to overcome.

### **A Variety of Interpretations**

Some believe this to be a parable illustrating the reward of the saved, final punishment of the wicked and the futility of a warning from the dead. Also, if they ignore God's word when given, then one coming back from the dead would be unheeded as well. (Consider the resurrection of the other

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Lazarus that they were all aware of). Certainly those points are well made, but is there more we can learn?

Additionally there are those that say the main point is simply to teach the truth of the resurrection and the punishment of those who rejected God.

Still others remind us of a special obligation given to the nation of Israel for the benefit of the rest of the world. They base this on the last part of verse six in Isaiah 49, "...I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth." (Also see Isa. 42:6 & Luke 2:32).

Certainly the nation of Israel was blessed with the knowledge of the true God and given His commandments that teach one how to have a good and successful life. However, they decided God was their own private God and became self-righteous (particularly the religious leaders) and considered all Gentiles as no better than dogs, thus failing to be the light that God desired them to be.

According to this concept, the rich man would represent the Jews as being rich in the knowledge of God; Lazarus would therefore represent the Gentile nations as being poor and destitute of the blessings contained in the knowledge of God.

Others believe it to be the recounting of an actual event and find in it proof positive that upon death we go immediately to our eternal reward or punishment fully conscious. But

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some Bible scholars i.e. “New World Dictionary,” assert that it has nothing to do with the present state of the dead, but rather describes events as they are occurring at the final resurrection.

With such a variety of views on the account of Lazarus and the rich man shouldn't this subject be given more than a casual perusal, but an in depth study.

Is this just another parable like the many others in Luke chapters 15 and 16, a real life event, or maybe both? In Matthew 13:34 we are told Jesus would only speak to the multitudes in parables. As always, it is important to consider context and who is being addressed. Jesus' audience at this time was primarily publicans, sinners, Pharisees and scribes, most of whom were hostile to Him (Luke 15:1-2). Could that have a bearing on why He spoke to them in parables?

### **Why Parables?**

Many assume that Jesus used parables to make His messages easier to understand, but that is not why He used them. Read His explanation to those to whom understanding is given and to those to whom it is hidden in Matthew 13:10-16.

(10) “And the disciples came, and said unto him, ‘Why speak thou unto them in parables’? (11) He answered and said unto them, ‘Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. (12) For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and

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he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.

(13) Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. (14) And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive:

(15) For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. (16) But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear.””

### **An Uncompromising God**

One thing we know, God will not compromise his truth just to make a point. So instead of making a hasty conclusion we should look deeper.

It is not only important to understand what is stated but also what is not stated. We all have a tendency to make assumptions that are based on previous beliefs or biases and impute thoughts and conclusions that are simply not there.

“Convictions are *often* more dangerous foes of truth than lies” -- (Friedrich W Nietzsche, 1844-1900).

A false foundation leads to a false conclusion, therefore it is imperative that we frequently review and verify our foundational truths as taught in the word of God.

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“When an honest man discovers he is wrong, he must change his belief or become dishonest” (David Justice).

God says, “For I am the LORD, I change not ...” (Mal. 3:6). How quickly we forget what He says, or even think that He would change His basic truths for different situations. He tells us that “Every word of God is pure: He is a shield unto them that put their trust in him.”

His word becomes our shield against Satan’s lies, but we must believe and apply what it says. We know that properly understood His word is not contradictory. If we assume a scripture says something that it does not say causing it to contradict other scriptures, could our assumptions be considered as “adding to it?”

“Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar” (Prov. 30:5-6).

### **Satan Is Not Only Alive, but Is Very Active**

We are told that Satan has deceived the whole world (Rev. 12:9), apparently with the help of false ministers appearing as ministers of righteousness, (II Cor. 11:13-15) and false prophets promoting a false Christ (Matt. 24:23-24 KJV). Their messages are so insidious yet so convincing that only the very elect can escape their deceptions. Did you notice - the very elect? Is Jesus telling us that some of the elect will be deceived? He tells us that many will come, even not denying that Jesus is the Christ, therefore we should take heed that “no man deceive you” (Matt. 24:4-5). We must constantly validate our beliefs by the word of God.

## **Did God Change His Mind about Death, Or Was It Your Minister?**

God said: "...for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (dying ye shall die YLT) (Gen 2:17). Mortal things die. But Satan says, "...Ye shall not surely die" (Gen 3:4).

And so man believes that he has an immortal soul that never dies. God's word reminds us that man is mortal and must put on immortality as we don't have it yet (I Cor. 15:53-54). Immortality is ascribed to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords who gives it to those of His choosing at the resurrection (I Tim. 6:15-16). Our mortal bodies will be quickened (to a glorified state) by His Spirit at His pre-appointed time (Rom. 8:11).

If you are deceived by Satan's first lie, then you open yourself to a web of other deceptions. If you come to a conclusion before considering all scriptures on a given subject, would the folly and shame of Proverbs 18:13 apply?

### **Death Described As Sleep**

God's word describes death as sleep and states we must be awakened from the sleep of death (Isa. 26:19, Dan. 12:2). But *man* says even after death man is not asleep but fully conscious. Shouldn't common words such as sleep, death and immortality used in the Bible carry the same meaning as they do in everyday use? Check a dictionary. Why change their meaning just to fit a cherished belief?

God's word describes what death is like, "Whatsoever thy hand finds to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goes" (Ecc. 9:10). Psalms 6:5 tells us, "For in death there is no remembrance of thee: in the grave who shall give thee thanks?" And in Psalms 146:4, "His breath goes forth, he returns to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish." Isa 38:18 affirms "For the grave cannot praise thee, death cannot celebrate thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth." As in sleep the dead have no knowledge of the passing of time. Why strive against the word of God?

David sleeps with his fathers, was buried and is not ascended into the heavens (1 Kings 2:10; Acts 2:29, 34). Abraham is mentioned with others who died without receiving the promise (of eternal life in God's Kingdom Heb. 11:13; 29-30). No mention is made of them being conscious; but they are described as being asleep and awaiting the resurrection. Why add to God's word?

### **Asleep but Not Forgotten**

"Then they that feared the LORD spoke often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name" (Mal. 3:16). Wouldn't this be the book of life (Rev. 20:12)?

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“For the LORD loves judgment, and forsakes not his saints; they are preserved for ever: but the seed of the wicked shall be cut off” (Ps. 37:28).

“...I entreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women who labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellow laborers, whose names are in the book of life” (Phil. 4:3).

“And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen” (II Tim. 4:18).

### **Kings Search Out A Matter (Prov. 25:2)**

If immortality is one of the rewards given to the righteous and the rewards are given at Christ’s coming, why are we taught that we have an immortal soul now? The word soul comes from the Hebrew word nephesh and is also used for any creature that has been given the breath of life (Gen.-1:21, 24; 2:19; 9:10, 12). (See study guides LIFE AFTER DEATH #1&2 for a more in-depth study of this subject).

### **Confusing The Word Hell**

Unless one is able to prove for their self that the hell of Hades has a different meaning than the hell of Gehenna it will be difficult to understand the true Biblical meaning of hell (see study guide UNDERSTANDING HELL).

When Jesus compared hell to the lake of fire why did He use the Greek word Ghenna rather than Hades? By studying how the New Testament’s original language

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(Greek) uses the words Hades as opposed to Gehenna, it becomes obvious that all those in Hades will be resurrected but those who are cast into Gehenna are burnt up in the lake of fire.

### **Multiple Resurrections?**

Unless you understand the sequence of the resurrections and who they refer to, it is very difficult to understand the different resurrections as described in the account of Lazarus and the rich man.

Can you prove for yourself that there are future physical, as well as spiritual resurrections, when they occur, and who are involved in each? Does Ezekiel 37 give us a clue (see IF A MAN DIE)?

Why is there a first and then a second resurrection a thousand years later (Rev. 20:4-5)?

Who are the participants? What triggers the first (Matt. 24:39-31) or the second?

Could Revelation 14:1-5 or 1 Corinthians 6:2 be describing those of the first resurrection?

### **One Thousand Years Of Peace**

What's going on here on earth during that 1000 year period (Isa. 65:17-25; Joel 3:18-20; Zec. 14:16)? Aren't these scriptures describing a time that has never been on earth so far but is yet to come?

Who are the priests of God going to reign over during those 1000 years (1 Cor. 6:2; Rev. 5:10; 20:6)? Consider Isaiah

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2:1-5, 30:20-21, or 42:9-10, or Micah 4:1-8). These are the physical survivors of the tribulation. During this time Satan is bound and is unable to influence mankind until the thousand years are complete.

When will the everlasting gospel be preached to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people? Has there ever been a time in history that this has been done before (Rev. 14:6-7)?

Wouldn't that be when all flesh will see Him and know Him (Isa. 49:25-26, 66:23: Luke 3:6: Acts 4:12)?

Why is Satan released after the 1000 years and allowed to deceive the nations once again (Rev.20:7-8)? Who are those nations? Aren't they mortal, physical human beings?

### **The Rest of the Dead**

Who are the rest of the dead? Could Ezekiel 37 be describing some of them? Compare the timing of John 6:44 (spring Holy day) to John 7:37 (fall Holy day). Is this a contradiction or could Jesus be suggesting the different callings mentioned in Revelation 20:5? Can the eighth day of the fall Holy Days be referring to that great day when the resurrection of the rest of the dead occurs (last day, Lev. 23:36)? A future time when all humanity who ever lived will have their first opportunity to know Jesus Christ?

### **A Final Resurrection**

It is appointed unto men once to die prior to judgment (Heb. 9:27), but there are those who are appointed to a second

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death. Who are they? Who are those who are not subject to it (Rev. 2:11; 20:6; 20:14; 21:8)?

At what point in time will there be weeping and gnashing of teeth, and who are those verses referring to? Are they not in torment; seeing their approaching fate (Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 24:51, 30)?

Who are those thrown into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:15; 21:8)?

Are the unrepentant ever given immortality (Rev. 20:15)?

### **Establishing A Foundation Using God's Word**

Shouldn't a prudent seeker answer the above as well as the following questions before coming to a conclusion about Lazarus and the rich man?

As to Lazarus:

1. When are the righteous resurrected (II Tim. 4:8)?
2. What is the reward of the saved (Matt. 25:46)?
3. When do they receive their reward (Matt. 25:31-46)?
4. Who are those of Revelation 20:4-6 if not the elect?
5. When will the angels gather the elect of God (Matt.-24:31)? Wouldn't that be the time when the angels carry Lazarus to Abraham's bosom?
6. How does the dictionary define bosom? Couldn't that be an apt description of the togetherness and endearment of the joint heirs of Abraham in the Kingdom rather than an imaginary holding place?
7. Has Abraham received immortality as yet (Heb.-11:8, 13, 39)?

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8. Did Paul teach that mankind was immortal and does not die (1 Cor. 15:54)?
9. Did Satan tell Eve that she would not die (and as a result be immortal, Gen. 3:4)?

As to the rich man:

1. The rich man died and was buried, but when did he wake up and lift up his eyes (Rev. 20:13, Rom. 2:5-6)?
2. Was Jesus describing a physical or a spiritual resurrection?
3. Luke 16:23 says, "...in hell he lifted up his eyes" from what hell did he lift up his eyes, Hades or Gehenna?
4. When will those in hell be awakened and in torment (Matt. 25:30, Luke 13:28)?
5. Can a spiritual being suffer physical pain?
6. Is Hades (grave) ever referred to as an ever burning fire?
7. What is the difference between the hell of Hades and the hell of Gehenna?
8. Does the Bible ever say the unrighteous are resurrected to eternal life?
9. When will the unrighteous be able to see Abraham in the Kingdom (Luke 13:28-29)?

God's word is truth in its purest form, its consistent and non-contradictory for -- "...I am the Lord, I change not" (Mal. 3:6).

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Even though Jesus' detailed description seems to indicate a specific situation involving specific parties, how does that prove the dead remain conscious at death and immediately go to their appointed place well ahead of the time of the resurrection and judgment? Claiming that the account of Lazarus and the rich man proves that Lazarus is in heaven (or some similar place) and the rich man is in an ever burning hell now, is a direct contradiction of God's word as revealed throughout the Bible.

### **Truth Essential**

John 4:24, "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." Why do so many sincere Christians stop at spirit and never quite get to truth? "... His word is truth" (John 17:17). His word tells us man is mortal, made of dust, and will die; immortality is not given until the resurrection, which won't be until His coming and then only to His chosen.

Doesn't the Bible teach that all receive their rewards at a specific future time, how then could the unrepentant go to hell and the saved go to heaven at the time of their death? Or, how is it they are judged before the time of judgment? Wouldn't they have already received their sentence or reward?

### **Conclusion**

Jesus concludes His account with what happened to them after their deaths and resurrection.

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Therefore, if Lazarus is awake and seen in God's Kingdom (Abraham's bosom), then he has been resurrected to a glorified (spiritual) body and is immortal. This can only happen after the trumpet sounds which will be at Christ's coming and resurrection of the dead (Matt. 24:31; 1Cor. 15:52; 1Thes. 4:16 etc.). It would also be after the rest of the dead lived again (Rev. 20:4-5) as the rich man has been brought up in the final resurrection (Rev. 20:15).

The rich man lifted up his eyes in hell (Hades, or the grave) and like all those in this final resurrection is facing the lake of fire and is in torment. He is able to see Lazarus in the kingdom as stated in Luke 13:38. "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out."

The rich man has not been given immortality but has been resurrected to physical life. He now faces the second death in the lake of fire and extinction (Mal.4:1-3). Also, we read, "But the wicked shall perish ... into smoke shall they consume away" (Ps. 37:20). Aren't these verses describing total annihilation?

Perhaps that great gulf mentioned in Luke 16:26 is the vast difference between the physical and the spiritual spoken of in John 3:3-8. Speaking to Nicodemus Jesus said, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6).

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Whether a parable, actual event or both, the above account does not contradict God's description of death, resurrection and hell. At any rate, Luke 16:19-31 does not support an immediate sentencing to an everlasting fiery hell or an instant going to heaven at death,

A parable is not necessarily an actual or true event, but a story to illustrate a point. But what point? Certainly not an instant and conscious sentencing to either hell or heaven at death and still be consistent with the teachings of the Bible. You choose.

### **Some Things We Can Learn From This Parable**

Being a descendent of Father Abraham is not enough for salvation.

Having material wealth does not count in the resurrection.

Looking to signs, wonders, miracles or even resurrections, is not the way to salvation.

Understanding and applying the teachings of Moses and the prophets can lead to salvation; thus supporting the relevance of the Old Testament.

There is a point beyond which it is too late to repent.

*(Note - The reader is encouraged to study all scripture references in their context to achieve a deeper understanding of God's word on this subject.)*

For a brief overview of God's appointed times as they relate to the redemption of mankind, see study guides **GOD'S INTRIGUING CYCLE OF SEVENS - IF A MAN DIE - LIFE AFTER DEATH 1&2.**

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